



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 23 JAN 2023

| | International | National | Regional and Local |
|--|---|--|---|
| Events, Opportunities Go to articles | 01/23 Day 334 of the Russia invasion 01/23 Pakistan suffers major power outage 01/23 Resentment: China exploits Solomon Is. 01/23 Japan PM: key security, defense reforms 01/23 Armenia-Azerbaijan tensions run high again 01/22 Day 333 of the Russia invasion 01/22 Russia claims advances Ukraine south 01/22 Germany not 'stand in way' tanks to Ukraine 01/22 Russia officials warns about arming Ukraine 01/22 China Lunar New Year Covid deaths 01/22 Police violently raid Lima university 01/22 Malawi confronts resurgence of cholera 01/21 Day 332 of the Russia invasion 01/21 Ukraine winter turn against Russia troops? 01/21 China girds for Lunar New Year travel 01/21 China: Covid infected 80% of population 01/21 Canada settles 'cultural genocide' for \$2B 01/21 UK sets 3-day coronation weekend 6-8 May 01/21 Burkina Faso govt orders French troops out 01/21 Eritrea troops endanger Ethiopia peace deal 01/20 US: Wagner 'transnational criminal' entity 01/20 US: 'very difficult' eject Russia out Ukraine 01/20 Serbian mercenaries train w/Russia troops? 01/20 NATO alliance over Ukraine: cracks emerge 01/20 China global mega-projects falling apart 01/20 Colombia halts new fossil fuel exploration 01/20 IAEA: Fukushima radioactive water release | 01/23 Women's March holds nationwide rallies 01/22 Covid reinfections increase health risks? 01/22 Covid, flu, RSV 'triple-demic' threat fades 01/22 Pandemic free school lunch meals end 01/22 Anti-natural gas frenzy spreads across US 01/22 Swift firing of cops become more common? 01/22 Inside the world of incels 01/22 Tax refund smaller this year? 01/22 Native Hawaiians priced out of Hawaii 01/21 Timeline of Biden classified documents 01/21 Classified documents Biden senate days 01/21 More classified documents at Biden's home 01/21 Storm-bruised California begins recovery 01/21 Atlanta protesters violent in 'night of rage' 01/21 Activist killed protesting Georgia 'cop city' 01/21 LAPD chief bans public 'thin blue line' flags 01/21 Unemployed find job searches take longer 01/21 Home sales tumble slowest pace in decade 01/20 Fastest-growing food retailer? Dollar stores 01/20 Real life 'Top Gun' kept secret for 50yrs 01/20 AWOL Navy SEAL killed in Ukraine | 01/22 WA Covid-19 immigrant relief fund 01/22 Federal Way plan: bulldoze parkland 01/22 Abortion rights supporters march in Seattle 01/22 Thurston Co. house fire kills 5 01/22 Spokane homeless shelter capacity? 01/22 Apple growers face export challenges 01/22 Yakima steps up in new airport site search? 01/21 Protests push back Lynnwood opioid center 01/20 Judge sanctions Seattle: missing city texts 01/20 Seattle Convention Center Summit opening 01/20 Google pulls out of Kirkland campus project 01/20 Spokane I-90 homeless camp shrinks 01/20 Health officials investigate measles case |
| Cyber, Tech Awareness Go to articles | 01/23 Govt cyber advise for UK charity sector 01/23 Sliver gains traction among threat actors 01/23 ENISA tool box: awareness raising in a box 01/21 Hackers exploit flaw in Fortinet devices 01/21 Massive ad fraud operation dismantled | 01/22 FanDuel warns of data breach 01/22 Hate speech on Twitter accelerates 01/21 Hackers in L.A. school district earlier 01/21 OneNote attachments spread malware 01/21 Tech giants' layoffs reverse hiring spree 01/21 Riot Games hacked; delays game patches 01/21 ODIN, law enforcement contractor, hacked | |
| Terrorism, Extremism Go to articles | 01/22 US: GRU, RIM Spain letter-bomb campaign 01/22 Iran vows 'reciprocal' response to EU 01/22 Canada to repatriate 'Jihadi Jack' terrorist 01/22 New militant group emerges in Niger Delta 01/22 Report: China modern weaponry to Taliban 01/22 Extremists storm Somalia capital govt office 01/21 Court: Canada must repatriate 4 from Syria 01/20 Kidnapped women Burkina Faso freed 01/20 Teen admits terror attack plot in London | 01/22 NYPD nabs suspect sowing terror overseas 01/22 Military captures 2 ISIS members in Syria 01/22 Atlanta protest domestic terrorism arrests 01/21 Southern CBP nabs 17 on terror watch list 01/20 Military strikes al-Shabab in Somalia 01/20 Danger of media echo chamber extremism | 01/22 Spokane woman domestic terrorism arrest |
| Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles | 01/22 Ageing planet: new demographic timebomb 01/20 Biofoul: dream cruises into nowhere trips | 01/22 Worst avian flu outbreak in US history 01/21 Surveillance program captures \$\$ transfers 01/20 TSA investigates exposure 'no fly' list data | 01/20 TSA: WA record for firearms in airports 01/20 Clallam Co. SO turns to crowdfunding help |
| Crime, Criminals Go to articles | 01/22 Brazil riot: crimes against democracy? 01/21 Haiti gangs expand control 01/21 UK hotel: child asylum seekers kidnapped 01/20 Dubai frees Europe 'super cartel' drug lords | 01/23 Mass shootings: 33 in 3 weeks 01/23 Motive sought for Calif. mass shooting 01/23 Man wrestles gun from L.A. mass shooter 01/22 Suspect in L.A. mass shooting killed self 01/22 L.A. sheriff: 'mass shooting' Monterey Park 01/22 Baton Rouge club shooting: 12 injured 01/22 Jan 6 riot charges: 3 active-duty USMC 01/21 Atlanta police arrest violent protesters 01/21 School downplayed warnings about 6yr-old 01/21 DOJ criminal probe into formula shortage 01/20 'Cult' leader receives 60yrs in prison | 01/22 Tacoma police: 3rd homicide in 10days 01/22 Shooting at Tacoma high school injures 2 01/22 Seattle low dead body storage; fentanyl OD 01/21 King Co. 35 fentanyl-related deaths in Jan. |

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Inside the world of incels |
| SOURCE | https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11513143/Inside-world-incels-sinister-secret-codes-women-hating-men.html |
| GIST | <p>An 'ex-incel' has shone a light on the sinister world of involuntary celibates and their cryptic online language.</p> <p>A 23-year-old from Chicago has lifted the lid on incel ideology which, in its simplest form, refers to people unable to find a romantic or sexual partner despite wanting one.</p> <p>Yet recently, incels have become more known as violent extremists, with the term made famous following a number of mass murders including the 2014 Isla Vista killings committed by Elliot Rodger, and the UK's Plymouth gun attack in 2021.</p> <p>The Plymouth gunman, Jake Davison, 23, killed five people, including his mother and a toddler before turning the gun on himself.</p> <p>An inquest begun just this Tuesday for the victims of his attack, with concerns raised about why the UK man was allowed to legally own a firearm under a sporting licence.</p> <p>Elliot Rodger also killed six people and injured fourteen near the University of California campus before shooting himself.</p> <p>He committed these crimes after believing he was 'denied' sex and love.</p> <p>Despite this, Riley Drapp of Chicago, stressed that not all incels have violent tendencies and are often drawn to toxic online communities in their loneliest moments.</p> <p>The 23-year-old urged that young men struggling with their sexual identities need more support to steer them away from extremism.</p> <p>He said: 'I think the incels featured on the news are the one per cent - those are a completely different breed. Most incels are the ones with sexual struggle.</p> <p>'I was in a properly dark period in my life. I dropped out of college I didn't have a job and I didn't do well financially.</p> <p>'I was right about to turn 21 and then the pandemic happened, so I couldn't go out to a bar or anything so that was kind of sad.</p> <p>'I didn't really have many friends. I just felt like my life wasn't really going anywhere.</p> <p>'All I would do all day is stay eternally online on social media, maybe playing a game or two here or there but I realised it really didn't help.'</p> <p>Riley found a dark part of the internet which he claimed was largely driven by 18 to 25-year-olds with a 'warped perception' on life.</p> <p>For over a year, he looked at life through the lens of incel terminologies and theories.</p> <p>The community hosts a number of 'pill' ideologies ranging in colours such as black, blue, red and purple.</p> |

Riley related most to the beliefs of the black pill which he described as having accepted his fate of feeling unattractive and sad.

Incels also uses a number of terms to describe different types of people.

The word 'chad' is used to represent a conventionally attractive and successful man, while a 'Stacy' depicts a conventionally attractive woman.

The idea of 'looksmax' also refers to using earnings, possessions, exercise or plastic surgery to maximise attractiveness.

Some incels have taken the idea of this to another level by [hitting themselves in the face with hammers in an attempt to become more attractive](#).

At one point, Riley was hooked on much of the vocabulary used by incels.

He said: 'One time my parents had a neighbourhood party and there was this one kid and he looked around 6ft 2 and he had his girlfriend there. He had a little bit of muscle and I was like "oh this guy looks like a gigachad".'

'I wanted to get those incel terms out of my head - the whole chad, the whole red pill, the whole black pill - all those really toxic terms just out of my head.'

One of the most extreme phrases used by some is 'going ER' which refers to conducting a killing spree in the name of mass murderer Elliot Rodger.

'LDAR' also translates to Lie Down and Rot, which some incels use to express that there is no hope in life.

Although Riley stressed that he did not resonate with the community's more extreme outlooks, he did admit to feeling jealous of women at one point.

He continued: 'I wouldn't say I was ever at the extreme point, more so just a point of jealousy and a really low point in my life. I would never wish ill-will on anybody. I don't think I hated women and didn't feel animosity.'

Riley was motivated to quit the incel community for good after learning more about the [#MeToo](#) movement a few years ago.

A long list posted online alleged that more than one hundred gamers in an internet Super Smash Bro community had committed sexual misconduct - some of which Riley had previously spoken with.

Nintendo said it was 'deeply disturbed' by the allegations and issued a statement to [IGM](#).

The company expressed that it condemns 'all acts of violence, harassment, and exploitation against anyone and that we stand with the victims.'

'I never really saw it coming - it was disturbing. I thought, "oh god I don't want to be around these people",' Riley said.

The 23-year-old has since been drawn to advice forums such as 'incel exit' on Reddit which has allowed him to talk with other incels who are looking to break out of the extremist community.

He continued: 'I found incel exit which is more so a guidance for people who want to leave this very toxic community.'

'Thankfully I lived with a very supportive family - I am very thankful for that. I sent them a little bit about this stuff and they were like "yeah this is kind of disturbing you should probably not look at this".'

Riley has also now managed to get a job building utility boxes for an electrical company.

He added: 'Now I'm trying to eat a little bit healthier and trying to take care of myself a little bit better.'

But Riley feels that some type of charity support could help other young men who fall into the trappings of the incel community.

He said: 'The thing with a lot of incels is that they need some kind of guidance. The reason why they have these feelings is for a reason it's not like they have things completely perfect in life.

'The things online makes people think this is how reality really works but it doesn't - they are really extreme ways of feeling things.

'Maybe they don't have anyone else to look up to. You've got to understand that there always might be something causing this. A lot of them do not know where to go towards.'

While Riley lives in the U.S, incel culture also persists in the UK where there have been [calls to make it part of school curriculum](#) in an attempt to tackle misogyny.

At the start of 2022, [incel sites grew from 114,420 monthly visits to 638,505](#), with many referring to the Plymouth gunman as a hero.

Two years prior also saw the first incel investigation conducted by [Britain's counter-terrorism police](#). [Teacher, Kathryn Downs from a Leeds secondary school previously said](#): 'A study in October 2021, suggested that there was a 6.3 per cent chance of being suggested an incel-related video by YouTube within five "hops" of a non-incel related video.

'Clearly this shows the dangers of failing to support and improve the mental wellbeing of boys within schools.

'Language and stereotyping attitudes such as "cry like a girl" or "fight like a boy" means that boys as well as girls still struggle to express their own difficulties with their mental wellbeing or feel like they need to suffer in silence.'

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/22 Apple growers face export challenges |
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| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/business/wa-apple-growers-face-export-challenges/ |
| GIST | <p>QUINCY, Grant County — Washington apple growers, having survived a wild and crazy 2022, are making the turn into a new year with a market that’s looking pretty good domestically but facing some export challenges.</p> <p>Riley Bushue, director of congressional relations and export programs for the Northwest Horticultural Council, cited Washington apple sales to India as an example of the export issues.</p> <p>“In India, we face retaliatory tariffs on apples,” he said. “Those were put in place by India in 2018 in response to the U.S. putting in place steel and aluminum Section 232 tariffs.”</p> <p>Section 232 of the Trade Expansion act provides the U.S. president with the power to adjust imports, including with the use of tariffs, if imports are found to be a threat to national security. Then-President Donald Trump utilized that power in March of 2018 to establish a 25% tariff on steel and aluminum from most nations with the exceptions of Canada and Mexico, according to the U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security.</p> |

Bushue estimated Washington growers sold about \$120 million worth of apples to India in 2017-18 before the tariffs were imposed. He estimated 2022 sales at about \$3 million.

“That’s in large part due to those tariffs,” he said.

“We have a similar situation happening in China, where we have retaliatory tariffs as well,” he said.

“Combined, between India and China, those have cost our industry over the last four years — a few more than four years now — over \$800 million. So that’s a huge challenge that we’re working through.

“At the end of the day, we need to bring an end to this retaliation. Those are two important markets — just on a pure population basis, the two largest countries in the world. And we’re obviously conveniently located on the Pacific to serve those countries,” Bushue said.

The entire Washington delegation to the U.S. Congress sent a letter to Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo and U.S. trade officials, requesting that apple tariffs be on the agenda when U.S. trade representatives met with their Indian counterparts at a scheduled Trade Policy Forum in mid-January.

“The tree fruit industry has suffered significant losses due to India’s retaliation for U.S. Section 232 tariffs,” the letter said. “On average, 30% of the apples, pears and cherries produced in the Pacific Northwest are exported and India was once a strong market. With retaliatory tariffs in place, Washington state apple growers have continuously lost market share in India.”

The export troubles, however, don’t stop there.

“The last few years there have also been a lot of challenges with ocean shipping — congestion in the ports, and while that’s improved, it can still be a challenge,” Bushue said.

Tim Kavis, director of communications and events for the Washington State Tree Fruit Association, said the news is better on the domestic market.

“We’re still seeing strong domestic consumption of apples,” Kavis said.

As of Jan. 13, Washington extra-fancy size-80 Galas were selling for an average of about \$44 to \$46 per 40-pound box, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture marketing report. Size-80 Fujis were selling for an average of about \$37 to \$39 per box, and Washington extra fancy size-80 Honeycrisp were bringing an average of \$50 to \$52 per box.

Apples for the fresh market typically are sold in 40-pound boxes, and the size designation is based on the number of apples it takes to fill a box. So it takes 80 size-80 apples to fill the box. Generally, bigger apples are more desirable and bring higher prices. Size-72 Galas were bringing an average of \$46 to \$48 per 40-pound box. Size-72 Fujis were selling for an average of \$37 to \$39 per box, and size-72 Honeycrisp were selling for an average of \$60 to \$67 per box.

How the fruit looks also matters, and “fine appearance” fruit sells for higher prices.

Canada and Mexico remain the top markets for Washington apples, Bushue said.

“Obviously, the advantage that Mexico and Canada have is that they’re land transport,” he said. “They’ve always been important markets, but that’s certainly been an advantage the last few years.”

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 China Lunar New Year Covid deaths |
| SOURCE | https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/22/world-covid-19-China-12660-deaths-week-Lunar-New-Year-begins/4071674398798/ |

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| GIST | <p>Jan. 22 (UPI) -- Mainland China rang in the Lunar New Year with large family gathering and big public celebrations with the strict "zero-Covid" policy no longer in effect despite a surge in cases and deaths, including 12,660 in past week, three years after the pandemic emerged in the nation.</p> <p>No true idea of the extent of the outbreak exists because the nation of more than 1.4 billion people no longer is listing daily data for deaths, cases and hospitalizations with sparse data now infrequent. Worldometers.info last reported data 14 days ago: 5,272 deaths and 403,302 cases. The world toll is 6,746,415 fatalities and 673,318,669 infections Sunday with a 37% weekly decline in infections and 23% drop in fatalities.</p> <p>On Saturday, China's Center for Disease Control reported 1,809 daily COVID-19-related deaths between Jan. 13 and Thursday including 680 cases of respiratory failure caused by the virus and 11,980 fatalities from other ailments combined with COVID-19.</p> <p>Last week there were 60,000 deaths reported since early December.</p> <p>The deaths only occurred in hospitals with one at home not included.</p> <p>Also only deaths from pneumonia or respiratory failure are counted. This is not how the death are tallied elsewhere in the world.</p> <p>Despite the crowds, a large-scale surge may be unlikely because about 80% of the residents have been infected during the recent wave, said Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist at China's Center for Disease Control on Saturday.</p> <p>More than 2 billion passenger trips will take place during the 40-day Lunar New Year season as people across the country return to their hometowns for family reunions, China's Ministry of Transport estimates in a CNN report.</p> <p>Around 33,900 people a day are dying, according to the British-based data firm Airfinity on Friday, compared with 14,700 one week earlier. Since Dec. 1 the cumulative fatalities: 708,000. The cases estimate is 112 million since Dec. 1.</p> <p>"Our analytics indicators suggest that the virus has spread more quickly to rural areas, partly driven by people traveling for the Chinese New Year celebrations," the report said. "This increased growth rate has changed our forecast from predicting two successive waves to one larger and more severe wave.</p> <p>In the updated mode, cases could peak at 4.8 million a day with 62 million predicted across June 13 and 27 before beginning to fall.</p> <p>Daily deaths are forecast to peak at 36,000 a day on Jan. 26, which is up from our previous estimate of 25,000 a day.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/23 Armenia-Azerbaijan tensions run high again |
| SOURCE | https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-01-23/armenia-azerbaijan-tensions-high-again-nagorno-karabakh |
| GIST | <p>MOSCOW — Two years after Azerbaijan and Armenia ended a war that killed about 6,800 soldiers and displaced around 90,000 civilians, tensions between the countries are running high again in a dispute over a nearly four-mile road known as the Lachin Corridor.</p> <p>The winding road, which is the only land connection between Armenia and the ethnic Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan, has been blocked by protesters claiming to be environmental activists since mid-December, threatening food supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh's 120,000 people.</p> |

The dispute raises fears that new fighting could break out. It also could destabilize Armenia's [chronically excitable politics](#). And it casts doubts on the competence and intentions of Russia, whose peacekeeping troops are charged with keeping the road secure.

Roots of the dispute

Mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh, smaller than Delaware, has significant cultural importance to both Armenians and Azeris. It had a substantial degree of autonomy within Azerbaijan when it was part of the Soviet Union. As the USSR deteriorated, Armenian separatist unrest broke out, later turning into a full-scale war after the Soviet Union collapsed.

Most of the Azeri population was driven out by the end of the fighting in 1994. Ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia took control not only of Nagorno-Karabakh but of sizable surrounding Azerbaijani areas.

[For the next quarter-century](#), Nagorno-Karabakh was a “frozen conflict,” with Armenian and Azerbaijani forces facing off across a no-man’s-land and occasional clashing. In September 2020, Azerbaijan launched a full-scale assault to take the region. The fierce fighting lasted six weeks.

The war ended with a Russia-brokered armistice under which [Azerbaijan regained control of parts](#) of Nagorno-Karabakh and all the surrounding territory previously occupied by Armenians. Russia sent a peacekeeping force of 2,000 troops to maintain order, including ensuring that the Lachin Corridor remained open.

Current trouble

In mid-December, Azeris claiming to be environmental activists began blocking the road, saying they were protesting illegitimate mining by Armenians. Armenia contends that the protests are orchestrated by Azerbaijan. In turn, Azerbaijan alleges that Armenians have used the corridor to transport land mines into Nagorno-Karabakh [in violation of the armistice terms](#).

After more than a month of blockages, food shortages in Nagorno-Karabakh have become severe as reserves run low. The local government Friday implemented a coupon system allowing only limited purchases of rice, pasta, buckwheat, sugar and sunflower oil. Local authorities have called for a humanitarian airlift of critical supplies, but Azerbaijan hasn’t given authorization for the region’s airport to operate.

Azerbaijan also has sporadically cut gas supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh — most recently Saturday evening — and electricity supplies are reduced.

Although Russia is tasked with ensuring the Lachin Corridor’s operation, it has taken no overt action to end the blockade.

The European Parliament has called for Russian peacekeepers to be replaced by a mission from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — even though the parliament criticized the OSCE for failing to resolve Nagorno-Karabakh’s status during the [decades that preceded the 2020 war](#).

Consequences

With its attention focused on the fighting in Ukraine, Russia has taken a wait-and-see approach to the Lachin Corridor blockade, angering Armenia. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan this month refused to allow Armenia to host military exercises of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization alliance, saying that “Russia’s military presence in Armenia not only fails to guarantee its security, but it raises security threats for Armenia.” Armenia hosts a Russian military base.

Russia’s involvement in ending the 2020 war was seen as a significant accomplishment that [boosted its influence in the region](#). The esteem it gained could be lost if it doesn’t take stronger measures to open up the road.

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| | Pashinyan's assent to the Russia-brokered agreement to end the fighting was widely unpopular in Armenia, with opponents accusing him of being a traitor and large protests demanding his resignation. Failure to resolve the current dispute, leaving Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians suffering and isolated, could provoke new unrest — and Pashinyan is aware of the potential power of such protests, having become prime minister himself on the heels of large demonstrations in 2018 . |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/23 Japan PM: key security, defense reforms |
| SOURCE | https://apnews.com/article/politics-japan-government-fumio-kishida-34cb4de68213404441026dcb84c13a71 |
| GIST | <p>TOKYO (AP) — Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Monday that Japan faces the severest security environment in the region since the end of World War II and pledged to push a military buildup under a newly adopted security strategy, as well as tackle rapidly declining births so the country can sustain national strength.</p> <p>Kishida's government in December adopted key security and defense reforms, including a counterstrike capability that breaks from the country's exclusively self-defense-only postwar principle.</p> <p>Japan says the current deployment of missile interceptors is insufficient to defend it from rapid weapons advancement in China and North Korea.</p> <p>In his policy speech opening this year's parliamentary session, Kishida said active diplomacy should be prioritized, but it requires "defense power to back it up." He said Japan's new security strategy is based on a realistic simulation "as we face the most severe and complex security environment since the end of World War II and a question if we can protect the people's lives in an emergency."</p> <p>The strategy seeks to keep in check China's increasingly assertive territorial ambitions, but it's also a sensitive issue for many countries in Asia that were victims of Japanese wartime aggression. Kishida said it's a "drastic turnaround" of Japan's security policy, but still remains within the limitations of its pacifist constitution and international law.</p> <p>"I make it clear that there will not be even a slightest change from Japan's non-nuclear and self-defense-only principles and our footsteps as a peace-loving country," Kishida said.</p> <p>This month, Kishida took a five-nation tour, including Washington, to explain Japan's new defense plan and further develop defense ties with its ally the United States.</p> <p>While the security strategy said China presents "an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge" to the peace and security of Japan and the region, Kishida said he hoped to maintain dialogue with China, including with its leader Xi Jinping, to found "constructive and stable relations."</p> <p>Japan plans to nearly double its defense budget within five years to 43 trillion yen (\$332 billion) and improve cyberspace and intelligence capabilities. While three-quarters of an annual defense budget increase can be squeezed out through spending and fiscal reforms, the remainder needs to come from a possible tax increase, and Kishida has already faced growing criticism from opposition lawmakers and even from his governing party.</p> <p>Kishida also faces a critical question of population growth.</p> <p>"We cannot waste any time on the policies for children and childrearing support," he said. "We must establish a children-first economic society and turn around the birthrate."</p> <p>Japan's population of more than 125 million has been declining for 14 years and is projected to fall to 86.7 million by 2060. A shrinking and aging population has huge implications for the economy and national security.</p> |

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| | <p>Kishida pledged to bolster financial support for families with children, including more scholarships, and said he would compile a set of measures of “different dimensions.”</p> <p>So far, efforts to encourage people to have more babies have had limited impact despite subsidies for pregnancy, childbirth and child care. Some experts say government subsidies still tend to target parents who already have children rather than removing difficulties that are discouraging young people from starting families.</p> <p>Opposition lawmakers questioned how Kishida’s government will manage hefty spending on key policies.</p> <p>Katsuya Okada, secretary general of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, said it is “wrong” that only defense spending has been predetermined, even when huge spending for measures to address low births and elderly care is expected.</p> <p>“It is important to think about an appropriate balance of the economy in the mid- to longer term. There must be proper discussion about how much should be spent for what,” he said.</p> <p>Japan is the world’s third-biggest economy but living costs are high and wage increases have been slow. The conservative government has lagged behind on making society more inclusive for children, women and minorities.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Tax refund smaller this year? |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/22/success/2022-taxes-what-to-know-refunds/index.html |
| GIST | <p>Official tax-filing season kicks off Monday, January 23, and it may hold some surprises for your wallet.</p> <p>So, whether you expect to file your 2022 federal income tax return right away or wait until the last minute, now is a good time to get a sense of whether you’ll owe more money to the IRS, or whether you’ll likely get a refund and if so, how much.</p> <p>Here’s why: The amounts might be very different than they were last year. Several popular tax breaks have changed since you filed your 2021 return. And your financial circumstance may have altered too, if you sold any assets or were laid off.</p> <p>If it turns out you will owe additional money to the IRS, and need some time to get the funds together, “You still can file but set your payment to go on April 18,” said Kathy Pickering, chief tax officer at H&R Block. (If you pay later than April 18, you may be subject to penalties and interest.)</p> <p>Why some may get a smaller refund</p> <p>Most Americans get a federal tax refund every year, and for many that refund is a big boon to their finances.</p> <p>But that boon may be smaller this year, in part due to the expiration of some tax-break enhancements that were in effect the previous tax year.</p> <p>Child tax credit: For tax year 2022, parents may claim a maximum child tax credit of \$2,000 for each child through age 16 if your modified adjusted gross income is below \$200,000 (\$400,000 if filing jointly). Above those levels, the credit starts to phase out. And the portion of the credit treated as refundable — meaning it is paid to you even if you don’t owe any federal income tax — is capped at \$1,500, and that is only available to those with earned income of at least \$2,500.</p> <p>But that’s well below the now-expired enhanced child tax credit that was in effect for 2021. Among other things, it was fully refundable with no earned income requirements, Pickering noted. And the enhancements let parents claim a maximum credit of \$3,600 for every child under age 6 and up to \$3,000 for children ages 6 through 17.</p> |

Child and dependent care credit: The tax credit that working parents use to [help pay for child care](#) or that filers claim to pay for the care of an adult dependent is also notably lower for tax year 2022. That's because Congress let the 2021 enhancements to it expire.

On your 2022 return, for example, you may claim a maximum of 35% on up to \$3,000 in expenses for one person, or up to \$6,000 of expenses for two or more people. It is a non-refundable credit, meaning you may only claim it if you have federal income tax liability to offset.

For tax year 2021, by contrast, the credit was fully refundable and was worth a maximum of 50% on up to \$4,000 in expenses for one person or up to \$16,000 for two or more.

Here's how much of a difference that makes, Pickering said. This year, if you have one child or dependent, you can only get a maximum credit of \$1,050 (\$2,100 for two or more). By contrast, last year your credit would have been \$4,000 (or \$8,000 for two or more).

Earned Income Tax Credit for those without children: The EITC, which is a refundable credit, has been a way to financially help low- and moderate-income workers (defined in 2022 as those with [earned income under \\$59,187](#)), and especially filers with children.

The [EITC](#) is also available to earners without qualifying children. But the size of the credit for someone in this group is just \$560 for 2022. That is almost \$1,000 less than the \$1,502 they were allowed to claim in 2021 as a result of a one-year enhancement that was part of the American Rescue Plan.

Charitable deductions: In order to justify itemizing your 2022 deductions, which include charitable contributions, they will need to exceed the standard deduction of \$12,950 for single filers or \$25,900 for those married filing jointly.

Most filers don't itemize. That typically means any charitable contributions they made during the year aren't reported on their returns because they got subsumed under the standard deduction.

But for tax years 2020 and 2021, filers were allowed to take what's called an above-the-line deduction for charitable contributions up to \$300 (\$600 if married filing jointly) in addition to the standard deduction. That above-the-line deduction, however, has expired.

Severance payments: If you were laid off last year and received a lump sum payment for severance, that money will be taxable in 2022. So if it happened late in the year, that may bump your 2022 income into a higher bracket, much the way a big one-time bonus might.

Or if you got unemployment benefits, make sure the state was withholding taxes on those payments. If not, that could mean you might have to send the IRS a check, Pickering noted.

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/23 Pakistan suffers major power outage |
| SOURCE | https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/pakistan-power-major-outage-rcna66933 |
| GIST | <p>Much of Pakistan was left without power for several hours on Monday morning as an energy-saving measure by the government backfired. The outage spread panic and raised questions about the cash-strapped government's handling of the crisis.</p> <p>Electricity was turned off across the country during low usage hours overnight to conserve fuel across the country, leaving technicians unable to boot up the system all at once after daybreak, officials said.</p> <p>The outage was reminiscent of a massive blackout in January 2021, attributed at the time to a technical fault in the country's power generation and distribution system.</p> |

Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir told local media on Monday that engineers were working to restore the power supply across the country, including in the capital of Islamabad, and tried to reassure the nation that power would be fully restored within the next 12 hours.

According to the minister, during winter, electricity usage typically goes down overnight. “As an economic measure, we temporarily shut down our power generation systems” on Sunday night, he said.

When engineers tried to turn the systems back on, a “fluctuation in voltage” was observed, which “forced engineers to shut down the power grid” stations one by one, Dastgir said.

He insisted that this was not a major crisis, and that electricity was being restored in phases. In many places and key businesses and institutions, including hospitals, military and government facilities, backup generators kicked in.

Karachi, the country’s largest city and economic hub, was also without power Monday, as were other key cities such as Quetta, Peshawar and Lahore.

Imran Rana, a spokesman for Karachi’s power supply company, said the government’s priority was to “restore power to strategic facilities, including hospitals,” airports and other places.

Pakistan gets at least 60% of its electricity from fossil fuels, while nearly 27% of the electricity is generated by hydropower. The contribution of nuclear and solar power to the nation’s grid is about 10%.

Pakistan is grappling with one of the country’s worst economic crisis in recent years amid dwindling foreign exchange reserves. This has compelled the government earlier this month to order shopping malls and markets closed by 8:30 p.m. for energy conservation purposes.

Talks are underway with the International Monetary Fund to soften some conditions on Pakistan’s \$6 billion bailout, which the government thinks will trigger further inflation hikes. The IMF released the last crucial tranche of \$1.1 billion to Islamabad in August.

Since then, talks between the two parties have oscillated due to Pakistan’s reluctance to impose new tax measures.

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/22 Native Hawaiians priced out of Hawaii |
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| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/native-hawaiians-flock-las-vegas-affordable-living-96594040 |
| GIST | <p>KAPOLEI, Hawaii -- Kona Purdy never wanted to live anywhere but Hawaii. As a Native Hawaiian, he wanted his children to grow up like he did: rooted in their culture, and nourished by the mountains and ocean.</p> <p>But raising a family in Hawaii meant squeezing nine people into a four-bedroom house — rented with extended family — in Waipahu, a Honolulu suburb. It felt cramped, but the Purdys accepted that this was the price to survive in their homeland.</p> <p>“We stuffed ourselves into one room,” Purdy said of his four-member family's living arrangements.</p> <p>Their share of the monthly rent was \$2,300. When rent increased, the Purdys realized that they could no longer afford to live in Hawaii.</p> <p>“I was so busy working, trying to make ends meet,” he said. “We never took our kids out to the beach. We didn’t go hiking.”</p> |

It's increasingly common for Hawaii residents to be priced out of the Aloha State, where the median price for a single-family home topped \$900,000 during the pandemic. On Oahu, the most populous island and where Honolulu is, the median price is more than \$1 million.

Many residents work in low-wage service jobs, and the financial strain is especially significant for Hawaii's Indigenous people. A state analysis published last year showed that a single person working 40 hours a week would need to earn \$18 an hour to pay for housing and other necessities in Hawaii, but the state minimum wage is currently \$12 an hour.

Many, like the Purdys, have headed to Las Vegas.

According to 2021 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, the biggest growth of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander populations was in Clark County, Nevada, which includes Las Vegas, and Sacramento County, California. The biggest decline of Native Hawaiian residents was in Honolulu.

Hawaii residents are spending on average 42.06% of their income on rent, which is the highest of any state, according to a Forbes Home analysis. California ranks second, but at a much smaller proportion of income going toward rent: 28.47%.

Estimates from the American Community Survey showed that in 2011, there were about 296,400 Native Hawaiians in Hawaii and about 221,600 on the continental U.S. Just a decade later, those numbers flipped. In 2021, there were about 309,800 Native Hawaiians in Hawaii and about 370,000 in other states.

"There's no Hawaii without Hawaiians," said Honolulu City Council Chair Tommy Waters, who is Native Hawaiian. His five siblings have all moved to the continental U.S. "That's just incredibly sad to me, that Hawaiians cannot afford to live in Hawaii."

Las Vegas was desirable to the Purdys because it's a popular vacation destination for Hawaii residents, which meant family would likely visit often. Also, the cost of living is significantly lower.

So in 2017, they uprooted their family and moved to Henderson, a Las Vegas suburb in Clark County, where they could afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment for \$1,000 a month.

Far from Hawaii's shores, they felt like "fish out of water," Purdy said.

"So it's real 'eha,'" Purdy said, using the Hawaiian word for painful, "because you do get disconnected from the land, which we're so connected to, being born and raised here."

But even though they were nearly 3,000 miles from home, Hawaiian culture was all around them. Thanks to many other transplants, the Las Vegas area is full of restaurants catering to Hawaiian taste and cultural events expressing Hawaiian pride.

There's even a real estate brokerage that helps families relocate from the islands — run by mostly former Hawaii residents.

"You go into any store in any part of the valley and you'll find someone from Hawaii working there or shopping there," Purdy said.

A three-bedroom home priced at \$300,000 in a Las Vegas suburb would be \$1.2 million in Honolulu, said Terry Nacion, a Native Hawaiian realtor. She left Hawaii for Las Vegas in 2003 because home ownership felt unattainable. "Back home, you either had to have your home passed down to you or you have to work four jobs," she said.

A few months after they moved, about 20 other relatives, including Purdy's mother, uncle and sister Lindsay Villarimo, followed them.

“Over time, it just became exhausting trying to make ends meet,” said Villarimo. “It’s heartbreaking that’s the choice we make. The majority of us, I think we just got priced out of home.” When Villarimo and her family decided to move to Nevada, her husband Henry had never even left Hawaii.

Las Vegas’ affordability was “liberating,” she said. With cheaper rent and groceries, and no state income tax, she could stretch her paycheck further.

“We were just living it up in the dollar store,” she said. In Hawaii, that type of store doesn’t exist.

For Hawaii residents, the draw to Las Vegas can all be traced back to a downtown hotel that opened in 1975, author Dennis M. Ogawa said.

The hotel originally catered to Californians, but he struggled to get business. Reminded of gambling’s popularity in Hawaii, it shifted focus to visitors from the islands. “Aloha Spoken Here” became the hotel’s slogan.

In 2019, Doreen Hall Vann decided to move to Las Vegas to be closer to her daughter, who had moved to Seattle for more job opportunities.

On Facebook, she gushed about how much cheaper everything was, from bread to rent. But she started to worry about staying connected to her culture while living far from home, especially because she uprooted her son, who was then 6 years old, from his Hawaiian language immersion school.

“It’s just like when you give birth and you cut your umbilical cord. For us Native Hawaiians, our ‘piko’ is the source of life,” Hall Vann said, using the Hawaiian word for navel or umbilical cord. “When we move off island ... we are disconnected because we’re not on our land anymore.”

But in her new home, she found she had more time and less stress.

“I was so busy back home trying to make a living,” she said. “When I moved to Vegas, it really put a pause in my life and I could see things a lot clearer.”

That allowed her to get involved in the Las Vegas Hawaiian Civic Club, where she now teaches Hawaiian.

“We have our people, our home, our community is thriving,” she said.

In Las Vegas, Purdy’s children began to learn hula and the family enjoyed “hoolaulea,” cultural festivals that were bigger than celebrations back in Hawaii.

But in August 2021, exactly four years after leaving Hawaii, the Purdys moved back home.

Purdy said that his wife wanted to take care of her mother, who began showing signs of dementia. Their daughter also got accepted to Kamehameha Schools, a highly selective and relatively affordable private school system that gives admissions preference to students with Hawaiian ancestry.

The family moved to Kapolei, a Honolulu suburb not far from where they once lived, to share a five-bedroom house with their extended family. Now that the Purdys have three children, they rent two of the bedrooms.

Purdy is trying to find time to take his kids to hula lessons. Since moving back, the family has only been to the beach once.

“It’s a grind, it’s hard, it’s really expensive,” he said. “But I also feel like we’re exactly where we’re supposed to be right now.”

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| HEADLINE | 01/23 Resentment: China exploits Solomon Is. |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/23/world/asia/china-solomon-islands.html |
| GIST | <p>Down a dirt road outside the Solomon Islands' capital city, past Chinese construction projects and shops where Chinese merchants sell snacks, a tribal chief tried to explain what it feels like to have a rising superpower suddenly take an interest in a poor, forgotten place desperate for development.</p> <p>“At first,” said the chief, Peter Kosemu, 50, as he sat in the shade on Guadalcanal, the largest of the Solomon Islands, “most people just wanted to see what was going on.”</p> <p>He and many others have watched China rush headlong into seemingly every corner of the economy and politics of this South Pacific nation over the past three years, spurring fears in the West that Beijing is trying to set up an outpost that could play a strategic role in any future conflict with the United States and its allies.</p> <p>China has opened a large embassy, started construction on a stadium complex and signed secretive deals with the government on security, aviation, telecommunications and more. Many islanders liken it to seeing carpenters waltz unannounced into your kitchen, drawing up plans, tearing down and building, with little explanation.</p> <p>The longer it has gone on, the more curiosity about China's big spending and lending has given way to concern and a simmering anger that comes from asking questions never answered. Workers at the stadium — including many who commute from where Mr. Kosemu lives — complain about unfulfilled promises on pay. Residents fret that the prime minister and Chinese officials are undermining democracy, as politicians who resisted China's plans, or just asked tough questions, have reported that their rivals are suddenly flush with money and pro-China messages that the public is expected to simply accept.</p> <p>“There's no proper consultation with the people,” Mr. Kosemu said. “No one is happy about it.”</p> <p>For years, Beijing has thrown its wealth across the globe to fuel its economy, gain geopolitical influence and blunt criticism. The Solomon Islands has been portrayed by Chinese state media as a model of what China's international efforts can accomplish, suggesting an unstoppable march toward dominance by America's main competitor.</p> <p>“Chinese modernization offers humanity a new choice,” China's leader, Xi Jinping, said at the Communist Party congress in late October, when he secured a third term and was beginning to re-engage China with the world after a Covid hiatus.</p> <p>But in the Solomons, a nation of about 700,000 people and around 1,000 islands in the sea lanes between Australia and the United States, recent experience suggests there is a cost to Beijing's confident, money-driven approach to expanding its power around the globe.</p> <p>For many islanders, China is productive, yes, and attentive, but they see it less as a benign partner than as an imperious and corrupting force that raises the risk of conflict.</p> <p>Anti-government riots led to the torching of Chinese businesses in November 2021. Among the protesters' main concerns was the way that China's influence seemed to tilt economic opportunity to politicians and places that were more willing to do Beijing's bidding.</p> <p>The government has shown no sign of changing course. In September, the Solomons delayed its 2023 national election, declaring it lacked the capacity to host in the same year both a vote and the Pacific Games, which will take place at the new stadium. As it has embraced Chinese technological infrastructure, the government has also taken on debt that the World Bank recently described as unsustainable.</p> <p>Some American officials worry that China's goal in the Solomons is to create a client state, securing deepwater ports and satellite communication sites. The country's prime minister signed a security deal in April that gives China a right to send police officers or naval vessels to the country with few limitations.</p> |

As Beijing's priorities have shifted from development to defense, fears of its strong-arm tactics are increasing. [Surveys show](#) negative views of China are soaring worldwide.

"China is much less successful than is commonly assumed," said Audrye Wong, a political scientist at the University of Southern California. "They think paying off people is a quicker and more efficient way of achieving the things the Chinese government wants. The reality is it often creates a backlash and doesn't work."

'They Don't Understand Us'

Every evening just before 6 p.m., workers stream out of the stadium complex in the capital, Honiara, that is being built by a Chinese state-owned company with what officials have described as a generous \$50 million grant from the Chinese government.

Signs out front boast of friendship, cooperation and safety in Chinese and English. But after work recently, at a food stand across the street, employees called all of that a lie.

"Everyone wants to strike because of the poor payment and lack of safety," said Lenny Olea, 35, a driver. "We need to get this fixed."

Mr. Olea said he was making \$1.20 an hour less than what he used to make at a hotel, after promises of extra money for food and transportation never materialized. A dozen others said that they had received no safety training, and that their Chinese foremen communicated with sign language and hit them in the head if they got something wrong.

"They don't understand us," Mr. Olea said.

The Chinese Embassy denied a request by The New York Times to speak with the ambassador. The Chinese company, China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, did not respond to emailed questions about the workers' complaints.

Since the government of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare switched allegiance from Taiwan in 2019, saying it would aid the country's development, more Chinese companies have set up in the Solomons. Islanders tell stories of warm interactions with Chinese merchants who migrated decades ago. But many complain that newer arrivals treat workers (and customers) like peons — owners often ring up sales from a platform that lets them tower over all who enter.

Some provincial leaders have resisted Chinese investment.

The premier of Malaita Province, Daniel Suidani, explained that he had welcomed projects from Japan and other countries but blocked attempts by China to do infrastructure work because he had not seen it add value elsewhere in the country. He said Chinese officials had worked with politicians in Parliament seeking to undermine him, funneling aid to their districts, rather than asking him about what the province needed.

"So far, the truth is no one has come," he said.

That lack of consultation remains a source of frustration across the country.

The Solomons' Indigenous roots include an abiding respect for dialogue. A broad conversation with the community is often required before major decisions are made.

China has operated with a more top-down approach. "What we have seen with the presence of China are pushy advisers," said Celsius Talifilu, who worked for Mr. Sogavare until late 2019 and now works for Mr. Suidani.

In places like Burns Creek, where around 10,000 people — many from Malaita — have built homes in a grassy flood plain, the lack of transparency has fueled a slow gas leak of resentment.

“People stay quiet in this country until it reaches a climax they can’t accept,” said Joe Kelesi, 39, an elder at the Bethlehem Worship Center. “Until something sparks their disappointment.”

‘This Is State Capture’

Outside the Chinese Embassy, posters show splashy renderings of future projects and photos of Mr. Sogavare with Chinese officials. It has the feel of a movie theater marquee, with Mr. Sogavare as the star.

Volatile and charming, he has grown more defensive as he has become more intertwined with Chinese projects. He has told reporters there will be no Chinese military bases in the country, but after watching Chinese police train with Solomon Islands officers for the first time, he declared: “I feel safer.”

Leaked documents point to how the security agreement may have come together. Meeting minutes from the Sogavare government showed that, in August 2021, money from the Chinese government went to 39 of 50 members of Parliament from a “national development fund” previously financed by Taiwan — about \$25,000 each.

A signed letter from Mr. Sogavare, 67, explained that the money had come from the Chinese Embassy. Internal memos seen by The Times also identify another set of slightly larger Chinese payments that followed the unrest in November 2021, directed to those who had voted to keep Mr. Sogavare from losing a no-confidence vote.

Three months later, [a draft of the security deal emerged](#).

In August, Mr. Sogavare also announced that a Chinese state-owned company, China Harbor Engineering Company, would build 161 cellular towers from Huawei, another Chinese company, with a \$70 million loan from the Chinese government.

China Harbor’s offices are in the same green building as the Solomons’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Neither responded to requests for comment, nor did Mr. Sogavare’s office.

Opposition leaders accuse China of encouraging the election delay and mounting what they say has been a bribery campaign to keep allies in power. According to civil society groups, Chinese money has been used to buy laptops for Chinese propaganda videos displayed at community gatherings.

Peter Kenilorea Jr., the deputy opposition leader, said that two government officials had recently offered nearly \$2 million to one of his father’s cousins to run against him; a little over a year ago, he added, another relative had been asked to run for about \$750,000.

The dollar amounts were far above what he believed would be possible without Chinese cash.

And China continues to spend and give. A few months ago, the Chinese ambassador [gave a new pickup truck](#) with “China Aid” painted on the side to a small hospital’s psychiatric unit.

Matthew Wale, the opposition leader, said: “This is state capture, happening in real life.”

The United States and Australia have tried to counter Chinese influence. Australia [will give](#) more than \$100 million in aid to the Solomon Islands this fiscal year. American military doctors also recently performed free surgeries alongside local doctors on an American hospital ship in Honiara’s harbor.

“China never does this kind of thing,” said Dr. Catherine Tirri, 40, as she observed a fistula surgery. “China doesn’t do service.”

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| | <p>A more skeptical question followed: Would there be any American follow-up? A plan to reopen a long-closed embassy has been caught up in red tape, limiting the U.S. presence to three diplomats (and a dog) living and working out of hotel rooms, with an interim embassy scheduled to open later this year.</p> <p>In the meantime, Mr. Kosemu, the tribal chief, said frustration with China and its proxies keeps intensifying.</p> <p>“The people have had enough of making requests to the government and being ignored,” he said. “Protests may be the only way to make them listen.”</p> |
| | Return to Top |

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| HEADLINE | 01/23 Women’s March holds nationwide rallies |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/us/politics/womens-march-roe-wade.html |
| GIST | <p>With signs declaring “Abortion Is Health Care” and chants about fighting back, activists in dozens of cities nationwide rallied in support of abortion rights on Sunday, the 50th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the landmark decision that was overturned by the Supreme Court, eliminating the constitutional right to abortion.</p> <p>The events, which were expected to draw thousands of people from Honolulu to Hartford, make up the latest iteration of the Women’s March, the protest series that began in 2017 in the wake of the election of President Donald J. Trump. They closely followed the March for Life in Washington, the annual anti-abortion demonstration that was transformed on Friday into a victory rally celebrating the rollback of Roe.</p> <p>In Texas, which led the way in strict abortion bans even before the fall of Roe, marchers gathered in downtown Dallas at John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza. In Boston, people rallied for abortion rights in the nation’s oldest public park, Boston Common. In Florida, which bans abortion after 15 weeks, more than a dozen events were scheduled.</p> <p>Vice President Kamala Harris spoke at an event hosted by Planned Parenthood in Tallahassee, Fla. In her speech, Ms. Harris denounced “extremist” Republicans and “so-called leaders” in Florida for restrictions on abortion and for rules that force health care providers “to risk going to jail just for doing their job.”</p> <p>She said that President Biden had signed a memorandum directing agencies across the government to assess how the federal government could remove legal barriers to providers prescribing abortion medication.</p> <p>“Let us not be tired or discouraged,” Ms. Harris said. “Because we are on the right side of history.”</p> <p>The marches, seen as a way to engage newer activists and energize their ranks for a long fight ahead, also drew veterans like Diana Wiener, 82, who showed up at the New York City event with the handmade sign she has carried to protests for five years. The sign reads “Never Again.”</p> <p>Ms. Wiener said she had an illegal abortion in the Bronx in 1959, more than a decade before Roe v. Wade — an experience that fuels her fury at the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn it, and her worry that too few younger women are engaged in the fight for women’s rights.</p> <p>“They have no idea what happened before — we had no birth control, really,” she said. The court decision “will not stop abortions, it will only kill women,” she added.</p> <p>In Madison, Wis., the day’s marquee event, thousands of women bundled in thick coats and pink hats marched down State Street, the crowd quickly doubling, then tripling in size despite the 26-degree cold. Among the protesters was Kim Schultz, 63, a first-time Women’s March participant who said she felt compelled to be there after the loss of Roe’s protections.</p> |

“It’s unbelievable,” she said. “It’s too far of a step backwards. I was just stunned and enraged that we could go back in time like this.”

National organizers of the Women’s March said their emphasis on widespread local actions — about 200 were scheduled in 46 states — reflected the recent loss of federal protection, and the prime importance, now, of state politics.

“The fight at the federal level just has nowhere left to go,” said Rachel O’Leary Carmona, the executive director of Women’s March, the advocacy group that grew out of the first march. “The theater of the battle has shifted from national protections, which are gutted. All of the fights for the years to come will be at the state level.”

Anti-abortion activists turned up at more than one event. In Dallas, a middle-aged man wearing white clothes splattered with red, apparently intended to resemble blood, blasted gospel music from a microphone. In Madison, a lone counter protester held a sign bearing images of what appeared to be fetal tissue. Marchers rushed to cover his sign with a Black Lives Matter flag.

Michelle Anderson, 52, who joined the Dallas march, said Black women always had to fight harder for the right to control their own bodies, even before Roe was reversed. “White women won’t do what they should do — they’re too afraid to vote against their privileges — so we’ll keep living through this until they do,” she said.

Many local events were led by fledgling activists with little or no prior experience, offering “a vital opportunity for them to enter into the movement and deepen their relationship to politics,” said Tamika Middleton, the managing director of Women’s March. “We want to make the barrier to activism very low for them to cross.”

The organization plans to build on that beginning, she said, as it has after past actions, engaging newly minted activists in ongoing conversations and offering training and mentoring to develop their skills and establish lasting networks.

“It’s so important to build infrastructure in the states now for the election in two years,” Ms. Middleton said.

The first Women’s March, which was held on Jan. 21, 2017, the day after Mr. Trump’s inauguration, drew millions of people to the streets of Washington and other cities around the country and the world to protest misogyny and to stand up for reproductive and civil rights. The global event saw huge participation again in January 2018, but attendance declined in 2019 after allegations of anti-Semitism among some of its leadership.

The coronavirus pandemic further limited the ability of the Women’s March to hold events and draw crowds. But since the shock of the Roe decision, organizers said, an infusion of new energy has propelled it forward, with strong showings at events held in May, after the court’s decision leaked and became public, and again in October, to rally support in the run-up to the midterm elections.

Organizers narrowed the focus of the march on Sunday from a broad slate of feminist causes to the fight for abortion access. They focused special attention on the event in Madison, in anticipation of an April special election in the state that could change the composition of the Wisconsin Supreme Court and help determine future access to abortion.

Kicking off the speeches in Madison, Ms. Middleton, the Women’s March managing director, dispelled the idea that activists were mired in grief.

“The other side thinks we should be mourning today,” Ms. Middleton said, drawing boos from the crowd. “They don’t know us. Today we remind them our fight was never just about Roe — our fight is for full reproductive freedom.”

Not all women's rights groups planned to march. In Los Angeles, Emiliana Guereca, the founder of Women's March Foundation, an independent nonprofit, said it was instead hosting a screening of the documentary "The Janes" followed by a panel discussion.

The HBO documentary spotlights the female activists who banded together to form Jane, a clandestine group that provided safe abortions in the years before Roe v. Wade.

"We need to march to the state legislators' offices, not on the weekend," Ms. Guereca said, "and bring them into the fold and talk to them about what they're doing to protect reproductive rights."

In downtown Atlanta, at an event that was hosted by the NAACP and other groups to commemorate the Roe anniversary, but that was not affiliated with the Women's March, a crowd numbering in the dozens held posters with slogans reading "Regulate Guns Not Women" and "Repeal Georgia's Abortion Ban." The state bans abortion after six weeks — before many women realize they are pregnant. The turnout on Sunday was strikingly smaller than at a march held over the summer, on the heels of Roe's reversal, when thousands marched in the city.

Peyton Hayes, an organizer with the Party for Socialism and Liberation, said the smaller crowd didn't mean anyone had given up. Looking ahead, she said, activists need to pressure the Republican-controlled state legislature to end the abortion ban.

In New York City, where protesters snaked their way down Broadway, chanting and dodging pedestrians, Bruna Monia, 35, recalled crying when she first heard Roe had been overturned. Ms. Monia welcomed her first child, Alice, 18 months ago, and said she was fighting for her daughter's rights as well as her own.

"She should have the right to choose what she does with her body," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/22 Anti-natural gas frenzy spreads across US |
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| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/22/new-prohibition-anti-natural-gas-frenzy-spreading/ |
| GIST | <p>The Biden administration, facing public backlash, has dropped plans to consider banning gas stoves, but that hasn't slowed down Democratic-leaning states, cities and towns that are moving to force residents and businesses to switch to all-electric appliances.</p> <p>A mandate to go all-electric is a bold gambit in the war to eliminate fossil fuels because it would increase demand on a power grid that relies heavily on fossil fuels.</p> <p>Montgomery County, Maryland, just outside Washington, was among the latest jurisdictions to ban natural gas for heat and appliances in new residential and commercial buildings. The County Council voted in December to require new construction to use only electric energy by the end of 2026. The D.C. Council voted to impose a similar ban on natural gas earlier last year.</p> <p>New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, announced this month one of the most aggressive statewide proposals of its kind: the elimination of natural gas hookups in new construction starting in 2025. The plan, which she said is necessary to fight climate change, would end the sale of all fossil-fuel-powered heating equipment across the state by 2030.</p> <p>Dozens of jurisdictions in California, including Berkley, San Francisco and San Jose, have banned natural gas appliances and heating. In Los Angeles, the Department of Building and Safety recommended in October that the city require new construction to use only electric energy.</p> <p>The American Gas Association said roughly 85 localities across the country have adopted some prohibition on the use of natural gas.</p> |

“It’s obviously spreading, like a virus,” Rachael Wilfong, a researcher at the Center for Energy, Climate and Environment at the conservative Heritage Foundation, told The Washington Times.

Energy policy analysts say more states and municipalities will soon force residents and businesses to give up their gas stoves, fireplaces, water heaters and furnaces and switch to all-electric heating and appliances.

Climate change activists, who are lobbying for states and the federal government to ban fossil fuels, want complete electrification of cities and towns. They say it would help end fossil fuel use as more solar and wind power is worked into the nation’s energy grid.

According to the Energy Information Administration, natural gas is the source of about 34% of all energy-related carbon dioxide emissions. The Obama administration labeled carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas and said emissions are endangering the climate. President Biden has pledged to reduce the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions to 50% of 2005 levels by 2030.

Advocates of fossil fuel point out that electrical grids rely mostly on coal, natural gas and nuclear power and derive only a small portion from renewable energy such as wind and solar. That means switching to electric stoves isn’t really producing green energy.

In New York state, renewables, mostly hydroelectric plants, powered 22% of the energy grid in 2020, according to the EIA. Wind and solar made up less than 2%.

Natural gas powered 46% of the state’s electricity generation, the EIA reported last year, and nuclear energy provided a fourth of New York’s power.

“Even if you believe in the climate science, there is no way replacing gas stoves with electric is going to make a difference,” Steve Milloy, a senior fellow at the Energy and Environment Legal Institute, a fossil fuel advocacy group, told The Times.

Mrs. Hochul explained in her address to the New York Legislature on Jan. 10 the reasoning behind her proposal. She told lawmakers that buildings are the largest sources of emissions in New York and account for a third of the state’s greenhouse gas output “as well as pollution that aggravates asthma and endangers our children.”

As she was pitching a statewide fossil fuel ban, the Biden administration was rushing to assure the public that the federal government did not support a plan to ban gas stoves.

Biden officials were backtracking on a statement from Richard Trumka Jr., a member of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, who said the panel would consider banning gas stoves because a study showed that they can cause asthma and are harmful to the environment.

“Products that can’t be made safe can be banned,” Mr. Trumka told Bloomberg News.

Mr. Trumka cited a study released this month that said gas stoves pollute the air and cause more than 12% of all childhood asthma.

The figure was derived from an analysis of past studies, including one that tested gas stove emissions after sealing a room with plastic wrap to eliminate all ventilation. The report was co-authored by the Rocky Mountain Institute, which seeks to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030.

Other data shows no correlation at all between gas stoves and asthma.

“A lot of the code changes occurring at the local level are being informed by controversial research on gas appliances and health that is not based on a real-world environment,” Steve Everley, managing director of the energy and natural resources sector at FTI Consulting, told The Times. “There is a

considerable body of research showing that indoor air quality issues are driven more by the act of cooking itself and that the most practical solution is using range hoods and other ventilation as manufacturers already recommend regardless of which type of stove you're using."

Mr. Trumka's threat to ban gas stoves created immediate backlash and ridicule of the Biden administration. An estimated 40% of all U.S. stoves are powered by gas, and many Americans prefer that method to cook their food.

"This is a recipe for disaster," Sen. Joe Manchin III, West Virginia Democrat, said in a Twitter post. "The federal government has no business telling American families how to cook their dinner. I can tell you the last thing that would ever leave my house is the gas stove that we cook on."

The creeping ban on natural gas is facing opposition. Florida and 19 other states, most with Republican-controlled legislatures, have passed bills prohibiting local governments from restricting natural gas use.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, eyed as a potential Republican presidential contender in 2024, said gas stoves allowed state residents who lost power during the summer's two hurricanes to cook their food.

"You cannot go down this road," Mr. DeSantis said. "But that is exactly what they want to do."

A week later, Mr. DeSantis pitched a tax holiday for gas stoves sometime this year.

"We'll do that," Mr. DeSantis said. "It's fine with me. We want you to be able to have a choice."

Washington state banned natural gas hookups in all new commercial construction and certain residential buildings beginning in July. In Colorado, Denver and Boulder are considering bans on natural gas appliances and heating in new homes and other buildings.

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Covid reinfections increase health risks? |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/23/repeat-covid-infections-health-risks |
| GIST | <p>A recent study states that Covid-19 reinfections could pose additional risks to people's long-term health – as compared to only getting Covid once – however some infectious disease experts in the US disagree that there is evidence showing repeat infections are more dangerous.</p> <p>The issue of the impact of repeated infections is becoming a crucial one in the United States as the Covid-19 pandemic is now tailing off amid a widespread relaxation of any social distancing or restrictions, which has seen many people catch the virus two or more times.</p> <p>A second or more Covid infection increases a person's risk of death, hospitalization and various adverse health outcomes, including diabetes and neurological disorders, according to the study published in the Nature Medicine journal that looked at the healthcare database from the US Department of Veterans Affairs.</p> <p>"Reinfection is consequential in the sense that if you get Covid again, even if you have had it before and even if you have been vaccinated, that still could put you in the hospital, that still in some cases, can result in death," said Dr Ziyad Al-Aly, an author of the study who works as a clinical epidemiologist at Washington University and as chief of research at the Veteran Affairs St Louis Healthcare system.</p> <p>But Dr Celine Gounder, an infectious disease epidemiologist and editor-at-large at Kaiser Health News, is among those who said that immunity from a first infection means that a subsequent infection poses a lower risk of such outcomes.</p> |

“There is nothing about a reinfection that is more dangerous than an original infection, and if anything, a reinfection is going to be lower risk because you have some immunity baseline at the time of reinfection,” said Gounder.

The debate over the risks of reinfections – which experts say are [likely to continue](#) – could determine what precautions people take against Covid and whether people worry unnecessarily at a time when the pandemic has already taken a toll on mental health.

The VA researchers decided to conduct the study because patients who had already been infected were coming to local clinics with this “air of invincibility about them”, Al-Aly said. “Some media actually started referring to these patients as ‘[super immune](#)’.”

To determine if that was valid, the researchers compared health outcomes among more than 440,000 participants with no Covid reinfection with about 40,000 participants who had at least one reinfection. They found that the reinfection posed increased risk of mortality and adverse health outcomes during the acute phase and six months after infection.

As such, when people consider whether it’s worth taking precautions to protect themselves from reinfections, “the answer to that is a yes”, Al-Aly said.

But other infectious disease experts see potential problems with the study. For example, the VA patient population is mostly older and male.

“What might pop up in a database with a lot of sicker, older people won’t necessarily apply to younger, healthier people,” said John Moore, professor of microbiology and immunology at Weill Cornell Medical College.

That consideration is important, Moore said, because the study could produce additional fear and angst in the general public, particularly in the healthy people who “worry about their health from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night”.

“If you’re getting anxiety because you’re reading information that suggests that if you get multiple Covid infections, you’re going to have long Covid” automatically, “I don’t think that’s helpful,” Moore said.

There is also new, perhaps encouraging, evidence that long Covid symptoms from mild infections resolve within a year rather than leading to chronic health problems among the vast majority of people, according to a study conducted in Israel and published in the journal BMJ.

“Many of these cases resolved certainly within a year, which is not great – I’m not trying to minimize this,” Moore said. “But there’s increasing indications that for most people, it’s not for life, which is a good thing.”

Al-Aly acknowledges that the study tracked mostly older, white, males but said its estimates are adjusted for these characteristics. He also points out that 10% of participants were women and 12% were under age 38.

As to the concern about the study prompting irrational fears, Al-Aly said he thinks “knowing is better than not knowing”.

“I would be much more afraid of uncertainty,” he said. “Armed with real knowledge, knowing the consequences, you can actually take measures to protect yourself, protect your family on an educated basis.”

But Brown thinks there has not been a definitive study on the impact of reinfections, in part because many of them occurred during the Omicron surge, and there has not been enough time to accumulate and analyze the data.

“That’s why I think we have to tread cautiously,” Moore said. “You can’t say that this is an established fact and therefore increase the anxiety levels in people who worry about their health unduly.”

US residents must now consider precautions – or not consider them at all – after Joe Biden declared the pandemic over and in a society where far fewer people wear masks.

When deciding how to respond to reports such as the VA study, it’s important to realize that reinfections are still risky, said Justin Lessler, an epidemiology professor at the University of North Carolina.

“However, that is not the same as saying they are riskier than a first acquisition of [Covid] in the pre-vaccine era; they are not,” said Lessler, who continues to wear a mask and is avoiding indoor dining amid the recent increase in Covid cases.

People who are at high risk of Covid or around people who are high risk should “remain cautious and use the tools at their disposal to try keep safe,” Lessler said. “However, I do think that needs to be balanced against the measures people are willing to take over the long haul, as intermittent periods of high [Covid] transmission are likely to continue far into the future.”

Al-Aly recommends that people take “common sense measures,” such as wearing a mask when using public transportation. He also suggested avoiding “unnecessary, very large gatherings”.

Asked what such an event would be, he said, “people have to decide for themselves, is that concert really worth it?”

He added: “At the end of the day, it’s really about risk tolerance for that individual person.”

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/23 Day 334 of the Russia invasion |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/23/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-334-of-the-invasion |
| GIST | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Germany <u>will not “stand in the way” of Poland</u> sending Leopard tanks to Ukraine, foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, said, in what appeared to be the clearest signal yet from Berlin that European allies could deliver the German-made hardware. Asked in an interview with French television station LCI what would happen if Poland sent its Leopard 2 tanks without German approval, Baerbock replied through a translator: “For the moment the question has not been asked, but if we were asked we would not stand in the way.”• German chancellor Olaf Scholz promised that Germany will “continue to support Ukraine – <u>for as long and as comprehensively as necessary</u>”, adding: “Together, as Europeans – in defence of our European peace project.” Germany’s new defence minister, Boris Pistorius, plans to visit Ukraine soon, he told a German newspaper.• Scholz said future decisions on weapons deliveries will be made in coordination with allies, including the United States. Under pressure to allow the shipment of German-made tanks to Ukraine, the chancellor said that all weapons deliveries to Ukraine so far have taken place in close coordination with western partners.• Poland announced it is ready to deliver 14 Leopard tanks to Kyiv but is waiting for “a clear statement” from Berlin, in comments made before <u>German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock’s interview</u>. Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, criticised Germany’s failure to supply tanks to Ukraine. “Germany’s attitude is unacceptable. It has been almost a year since the war began. Innocent people are dying every day,” he said.• Former UK prime minister <u>Boris Johnson made a surprise visit to Ukraine</u>, where he said that it was “the moment to double down and to give the Ukrainians all the tools they need to finish the job”. Downing Street said Rishi Sunak is “supportive” of Boris Johnson’s visit, despite warnings that it would undermine the current prime minister’s authority. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French president Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday he does not rule out the possibility of sending Leclerc tanks to Ukraine. “As for the Leclercs, I have asked the defence ministry to work on it. Nothing is excluded,” he said while speaking at a summit with German chancellor Scholz. • Russia claimed to have made advances in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia region. After months of stalemate in the south-eastern region, Moscow-installed officials say the front is now “mobile” while the Ukrainian army reported that 15 settlements had come under artillery fire. “During offensive operations in the direction of Zaporizhzhia, units of the eastern military district took up more advantageous ground and positions,” the defence ministry said on Sunday. • Zelenskiy has vowed Ukraine will not tolerate corruption and promised forthcoming key decisions on uprooting it this week. “I want this to be clear: there will be no return to what used to be in the past, to the way various people close to state institutions or those who spent their entire lives chasing a chair used to live,” he said in his nightly video address. The EU has made anti-corruption reforms one of its key requirements for Ukraine’s membership to the bloc, after granting Kyiv candidate status last year. • Norway’s army chief has estimated 180,000 Russian troops have been killed or wounded in over the course of the conflict, while the figure for the Ukrainians is 100,000 military casualties and 30,000 dead civilians. Norwegian chief of defence Eirik Kristoffersen gave the figures in an interview with TV2, without specifying how the numbers were calculated. The figures cannot be independently verified. |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Germany not ‘stand in way’ tanks to Ukraine |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/22/russia-claims-advances-zaporizhzhia-nato-squabbles-tanks-ukraine |
| GIST | <p>Germany would not “stand in the way” of Poland sending Leopard tanks to Ukraine, foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, has said, in what appeared to be the clearest signal yet from Berlin that European allies could deliver the German-made hardware.</p> <p>Asked in an interview with French television station LCI what would happen if Poland sent its Leopard 2 tanks without German approval, Baerbock replied through a translator: “For the moment the question has not been asked, but if we were asked we would not stand in the way.”</p> <p>Heavy diplomatic pressure has been building on Berlin to send its tanks, or at least allow countries that bought them from German to re-export them. As the producer of the Leopard tanks, Berlin has a veto on their transfer.</p> <p>But at a special international summit on Friday at the US military base in Ramstein, in south-west Germany, Berlin had stubbornly declined to take a decision on whether to give Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, leading to growing frustration from Kyiv and its allies.</p> <p>On Sunday, Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, criticised Germany’s failure to supply the hardware to Ukraine.</p> <p>“Germany’s attitude is unacceptable. It has been almost a year since the war began. Innocent people are dying every day,” Morawiecki said. “Russian bombs are wreaking havoc in Ukrainian cities. Civilian targets are being attacked, women and children are being murdered.”</p> <p>He went on: “I try to weigh my words but I’ll say it bluntly: Ukraine and Europe will win this war – with or without Germany.”</p> <p>It had been hoped in Kyiv and the US that Germany would allow Leopards owned by countries such as Poland and Finland to be re-exported. However, Germany’s defence minister, Boris Pistorius, said despite heightened expectations, “we still cannot say when a decision will be taken, and what the decision will be, when it comes to the Leopard tank”.</p> |

Morawiecki said he was waiting for “a clear statement” from Berlin.

Poland has announced it is ready to deliver 14 Leopard tanks to Kyiv. Morawiecki had said that if Germany continued to refuse to supply the tanks to Ukraine, “we will set up a ‘small coalition’ of countries ready to donate some of their modern equipment, their modern tanks”.

In an interview aired after Baerbock’s, the German defence minister, Boris Pistorius, said that he expected a decision soon on the delivery of tanks to Ukraine. Speaking in an interview on Germany’s ARD TV on Sunday, Pistorius said that Germany would not make a hasty decision because the government had many factors to consider, including consequences at home for the security of the German population.

In a joint statement Saturday, the foreign ministers of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia had also urged Germany “to provide Leopard tanks to Ukraine now”.

James Cleverly, the UK’s foreign secretary, weighed into the dispute during an interview earlier on Sunday with Sky News.

“Of course, I would like to see the Ukrainians equipped with things like the Leopard 2 as well as the artillery systems that have been provided by us and by others,” he said. “I will keep having those conversations with our Nato allies and friends, to facilitate the donation of the best military equipment to Ukraine to help them defend themselves against this brutal invasion.”

During a visit to France to mark 60 years of postwar Franco-German cooperation, the chancellor, Olaf Scholz, said Germany was supporting Ukraine and would do so for “as long as necessary”.

France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, said his government was examining the case for sending Leclercs, the main battle tank of the French army. “Nothing is excluded,” he said, while noting that such a move would be coordinated “collectively” with allies.

As European governments squabbled over the issue, Russia claimed to have made advances in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia region.

After months of stalemate in the south-eastern oblast, Moscow-installed officials said the front was now “mobile” while the Ukrainian army reported that 15 settlements had come under artillery fire.

“Attempting to probe our defence, the enemy has activated artillery fire,” wrote Oleksandr Starukh, governor of the Zaporizhzhia region of south-eastern Ukraine, on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia fired on the region 166 times through the day, Starukh said, with 113 attacks aimed at populated areas, killing one civilian.

Moscow said its troops were on the move towards Orikhiv, about 30 miles south of the regional capital, Zaporizhzhia, and Huliaipole, a city farther east, although Ukrainian officials said the level of progress had been exaggerated.

Yevhen Yerin, a Ukrainian military spokesperson in Zaporizhzhia, told the public broadcaster Suspilne: “At the moment, they have not captured anything. All their attempts have been repulsed and the enemy has suffered losses.”

He added that the assaults had not been large in scale.

Earlier this week, a Russian-installed official, Vladimir Rogov, had announced a “local offensive”, adding that the Russian army had taken control of the village of Lobkove, near the Dnipro River. He also said this week that the fighting had “sharply increased” in the southern region.

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| | <p>On Sunday, Rogov told the Russian state news agency Ria Novosti: “The front is mobile, especially in two directions: Orikhiv and Huliaipole.” He added that the initiative was with Moscow.</p> <p>Vladimir Putin claims to have annexed the Zaporizhzhia oblast along with three other eastern Ukrainian regions, but for all the Russian president’s boasts his forces do not control large swathes of the territory, including its main city.</p> <p>The Russian push in Zaporizhzhia will nevertheless be a cause of concern in Kyiv at a time when the promise of western tanks is proving difficult to secure.</p> <p>With the debate around tanks continuing, Vyacheslav Volodin, speaker of the Russian Duma – the country’s lower house of parliament – said Nato was leading the world to a “terrible war”.</p> <p>“If Washington and Nato countries supply weapons that will be used to strike civilian cities and attempt to seize our territories, as they threaten, this will lead to retaliatory measures using more powerful weapons,” he said on the Telegram messaging app. “Arguments that the nuclear powers have not previously used weapons of mass destruction in local conflicts are untenable. Because these states did not face a situation where there was a threat to the security of their citizens and the territorial integrity of the country.”</p> <p>Meanwhile, the former British prime minister Boris Johnson, who has been engulfed in a scandal over his finances in recent days, appeared in Bucha and Borodianka, north of Kyiv, to give his support. Johnson’s visits to Ukraine have often coincided with moments of domestic crisis. “This is the moment to double down and to give the Ukrainians all the tools they need to finish the job,” he said in a statement.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Swift firing of cops become more common? |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/swift-firing-of-police-is-rare-but-could-become-more-common/ |
| GIST | <p>BOSTON (AP) — The speed with which five Memphis police officers were fired following the traffic stop of a man who later died in a hospital is unusual but could become more common, according to those studying police and criminal justice issues.</p> <p>The five Memphis Police Department officers were fired Friday, less than two weeks after the Jan. 7 arrest of Tyre Nichols, 29, Officials said the five were dismissed for excessive use of force, failure to intervene and failure to render aid.</p> <p>It’s rare for a police department to act so quickly, said David Thomas, a professor of forensic studies at Florida Gulf Coast University. Investigations can sometimes go on for up to a year, he said.</p> <p>“It never happens this quickly,” Thomas said.</p> <p>All five officers — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Desmond Mills, Jr. and Justin Smith – are Black, as was Nichols. The decision to fire the officers followed a probe by the Memphis Police Department. Nichols died three days after the traffic stop.</p> <p>The U.S. Justice Department has opened a civil rights investigation. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation also is looking into the force used in the arrest.</p> <p>One recent turning point has been the advent of police body cameras, which can be quickly reviewed, along with cellphone video taken by passersby, said Thomas, who served 20 years as a police officer in Michigan and Florida.</p> <p>“In the old days, you’d have the officer’s word. If the victim was still alive, you’d have their testimony, If someone had died, you’d have the medical examiner’s report. All of that would play a role,” he said.</p> <p>“With body cameras, the evidence is right there.”</p> |

Nichols was arrested after officers stopped him for reckless driving, police said. There was a confrontation when officers approached Nichols, and he ran before he was confronted again and arrested, authorities said. He complained of shortness of breath and was hospitalized.

Relatives have accused police of beating Nichols and causing him to have a heart attack. Authorities said Nichols experienced a medical emergency. Relatives have pushed for the release of police body camera footage and called for officers to be charged.

Body cameras can only tell a full story if they are on and working throughout an entire incident, Thomas said. Some officers may forget to turn them on. Others may deliberately turn them off.

“Law enforcement can no longer act with impunity,” he said. “Absolutely, officers will be let go more quickly.”

Typically before a firing, officials will determine if an officer has violated a department’s general orders, which set out the procedures and regulations officers are meant to follow, said Patrick Oliver, director of the criminal justice program at Cedarville University in Ohio.

“The seriousness of the job action is based on the severity of the violation,” said Oliver, who spent 28 years in law enforcement, 16 of them as a police chief, including as chief of the Cleveland Police Department.

Firing an officer is the most severe job action, Oliver said, suggesting that department officials feel confident they can support the decision.

“There is far more scrutiny of police today,” he said. “When I was in policing there was less of a likelihood that something a police officer was doing would be caught on video.”

Oliver added that many times videos will confirm police acted properly. “I would say that’s the majority of times,” he said.

While unusual, it’s not unheard of for a city to fire an officer before criminal charges are filed, but that’s not necessarily the end of the story, said Stephen Rushin, a Loyola University Chicago law school professor who has studied police contracts.

Cities often give officers the ability to appeal disciplinary action, including termination of their employment, Rushin said.

“In many agencies, the initial decision to fire an officer begins a lengthy appellate process that can take months to complete,” he said. “At the end of this process, it is not uncommon for an officer to be rehired on appeal.”

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Yakima steps up in new airport site search? |
| SOURCE | https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article271495042.html |
| GIST | <p>Yakima’s interest in using its airport to relieve crowding at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport has the attention of state transportation officials.</p> <p>Amid airspace congestion reports and considerable opposition from westside cities and counties to a new airport, Rob Hodgman, the Washington State Department of Transportation senior aviation planner, said one community in Central Washington has stepped forward to help.</p> <p>“Just recently, we’ve found a potential partner in Yakima,” Hodgman said Wednesday as he discussed the matter with the Washington State Transportation Commission.</p> |

“There’s a lot of work that would be needed to make that happen, but at least we have a willing partner,” he added.

Hodgman was updating the state transportation panel about the Legislature-appointed Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission.

The commission has been asked to recommend a new site for a regional airport by June.

As The Seattle Times reported in November, an analysis of current and future use of Sea-Tac and Paine Field near Everett estimates that current plans for expansion at both sites will enlarge their capacity from 50 million annual passengers pre-pandemic to about 67 million by 2030.

By 2050, air passenger traffic in the Seattle region is expected to increase to 94 million annual passengers, leaving a capacity shortfall of 27 million passengers, The Times reported.

Additionally, air cargo traffic through the region is expected to more than double, from 610,000 tons per year before the pandemic to 1.4 million tons in 2050.

Therefore, the committee recommends that the state expand both Sea-Tac and Paine Field while also building a new airport on undeveloped land, The Times reported.

WESTSIDE SITES TOUGH TO FIND

In 2019, the Legislature voted unanimously and Gov. Jay Inslee signed a bill creating the CACC to consider the issue of overcrowding at Sea-Tac and to identify potential sites for a new airport.

According to WSDOT, the commission has 11 voting members (four positions are vacant) and 12 non-voting members, including Hodgman, State Sen. Curtis King, R-Yakima, and State Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, who has a background in aviation. The CACC has been meeting since October 2019 and announced three final site recommendations for a new airport in October 2022: two in Pierce County, southeast of Tacoma, and one in Thurston County, just east of Olympia.

On Wednesday, Hodgman reviewed the criteria used by the commission, including requiring sites to be within 100 miles of Seattle and west of the Cascade Mountains.

“One of the challenges of siting an airport of this size – 3,100 acres and two runways – is that it doesn’t fit in an urban space,” he said.

This prompted the commission to consider greenfield areas. The three finalists revealed in October, although rural areas, have faced objections from elected officials, nearby residents and farmers, The Seattle Times reported.

As Hodgman told the transportation panel, “We haven’t had anyone in Western Washington come forward offering a site for consideration. Quite the contrary: We’ve had many governments and municipalities indicate their opposition.”

In addition, a review of airspace use and capacity over the three finalist sites conducted by the Federal Aviation Administration and military officials show Seattle-area airspace to be extremely congested, Hodgman said.

The three sites where airspace could support a new regional airport – located west of Shelton, near Rochester and near Toledo in southwest Washington – are smaller airports which were eliminated from consideration by the CACC due to other factors, Hodgman added.

YAKIMA’S POTENTIAL AS A SITE

All of the above prompted Yakima City Manager Bob Harrison and the Yakima City Council to inquire with WSDOT officials about having Yakima Air Terminal's site considered for review as the state seeks a new airport.

"It appears the solutions on the west side of the state that were initially identified by WSDOT are not very viable," Harrison told the Yakima Herald-Republic in December.

"The Yakima airport layout and land near the layout would provide an opportunity to expand the runway that would allow for any class of airplane to land and take off.

"Additionally, Yakima airport has several inherent strengths as an option, including but not limited to the close location of rail for movement of produce and goods, excellent interstate transportation in the region, and the presence of education establishments that can provide excellent training of the workforce in the Yakima region," he added.

The council authorized city officials to conduct a community survey about the possibility of Yakima Air Terminal expanding to be the state's new regional airport. The survey, available at <http://bit.ly/3ZaasAS> through the end of the month, already has generated a high rate of response and shown overwhelming support for a potential regional airport, said Randy Beehler, the city's communications and public affairs director.

As of Thursday, Beehler said, of the 932 people who have taken the survey, 774 of them (83%) have answered "strongly support" to the question "Washington state is planning to build a new regional airport in the next decade. To what extent would you support or oppose the current Yakima airport being expanded and turned into this regional airport?"

Other possible answers were "somewhat support," "neither support nor oppose," "somewhat oppose" and "strongly oppose," Beehler said.

Yakima Air Terminal, also known as McAllister Field, was established in 1926, and its first runways were built in the 1930s. Today the site covers 825 acres, according to the FAA. The current passenger terminal opened in the 1950s, and today its southeast-northwest runway is 7,604 feet long, allowing Boeing 737 aircraft to take off and land. Its air traffic control tower, located adjacent to Washington Avenue, opened in 1974 but closed in 2022 after a car crashed into it. It is awaiting FAA approval on planned repairs, airport officials said this fall.

The Yakima airport currently offers only one daily outbound and inbound commercial flight to and from Sea-Tac due to Horizon Air schedule reductions made in September.

In the past decade, as many as four flights each day arrived from and departed to Sea-Tac from Yakima.

Hodgson told the state transportation commission that the airspace study and other technical findings regarding the three regional airport finalist sites will be discussed at the CACC's March 2 meeting. The commission plans to meet in May for a formal vote on a final recommendation to the Legislature, which is due June 15.

Community engagement and public comments on the issue will continue through the spring. For more information, contact Hodgman at 360-596-8910 or HodgmaR@wsdot.wa.gov.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 WA Covid-19 immigrant relief fund |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/what-applicants-to-washington-covid-19-immigrant-relief-fund-should-look-out-for/ |
| GIST | Applicants for the Washington COVID-19 Immigrant Relief Fund should hear by Monday if their applications have been approved. |

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| | <p>The relief funds, a minimum of \$1,000 per applicant, should arrive by the end of February.</p> <p>State officials started the fund in 2020 and 2021 to help people who were impacted by the pandemic but did not receive other economic aid as a result of their immigration status. The Legislature approved \$340 million in additional relief funds for 2022 and 2023.</p> <p>Applications for this round closed Nov. 14, 2022. Applicants should receive a text message or email by Jan. 23, said Karla Rodriguez, a civic engagement and leadership coordinator for Nuestra Casa, a Sunnyside-based organization that hosted events and helped community members apply.</p> <p>The money will be sent by Jan. 31 to the address provided on the application. It should arrive by the end of February.</p> <p>Relief funds will be delivered as either a prepaid bank card or a check. The bank card must be activated or the check cashed within 90 days. If recipients do not have a bank account, they can cash the check at Chase Bank for a \$10 fee, according to the immigrant relief fund website.</p> <p>If the funds do not arrive by the end of February, the bank card or check is lost or applicants have any questions, they should call 844-620-1999.</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Federal Way plan: bulldoze parkland |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/federal-way-plans-to-bulldoze-park-near-heart-of-growing-downtown/ |
| GIST | <p>FEDERAL WAY — A new downtown is emerging in Federal Way, where a performing arts center opened not long ago, a Link light-rail extension is under construction and the city hopes to develop a bustling public plaza surrounded by shops, restaurants and hundreds of new apartments.</p> <p>But some residents say the strip-mall suburb between Seattle and Tacoma could mar its maturation by bulldozing 11 acres of a nearby park to build a new operations and maintenance facility for city workers and trucks.</p> <p>The project has stirred debate over the past year as Federal Way — like other Puget Sound suburbs trying to reinvent themselves as transit-oriented hubs — wrestles with how best to grow. The city’s population recently hit 100,000.</p> <p>“They shouldn’t be able to come in and take a park away like that,” said Marie Sciacqua, a retiree who spends time at the park. “The city is going to be growing in this area. The kids need a place to play.”</p> <p>Approved by the City Council in a split vote last summer and scheduled for construction in 2024 — unless state requirements get in the way — the plan to build at the Steel Lake Park Annex calls for removing two ballfields, Federal Way’s only skatepark, tree-shaded pathways and a play structure. The Federal Way Historical Society and a soccer field would remain in place.</p> <p>Proponents contend building at the park is the cheapest, quickest way to get employees out of the cramped and dilapidated facility they currently use. They say the lost parkland can be mitigated by creating a new skatepark elsewhere and by improving ballfields in another neighborhood. Yet critics have raised equity concerns, arguing the project will reduce recreation options in an area that needs more connections with the outdoors, not fewer.</p> <p>Not only is the Steel Lake Park Annex walking distance from a light-rail station that’s supposed to open in a few years, but the site also is close to housing complexes for seniors and families — plus a high school, a preschool and a teen center. The census tract is 78% people of color, with a median household income of about \$55,000, which is about \$50,000 below King County’s median, according to census estimates.</p> |

“I would love to hear how many of our elected officials went and knocked on doors” at the housing complexes around the park to ask about the plan, said Cynthia Ricks-Maccotan, a longtime Federal Way community advocate who serves on the board of the Boys & Girls Clubs of King County.

The project looked like a done deal last July, when the council voted 4-3 to select the park as the site for the new operations and maintenance facility and authorized \$250,000 for design work, despite a public comment session dominated by residents with doubts about the concept. The plan advanced further in November, when the council budgeted \$42 million for the project for 2024, based on the assumption that the city will issue bonds. The city could sell the site of the existing facility or retain it for another use.

“We’ve been working on this a long time,” Public Works Director E.J. Walsh told the council in July. “This is not a spur of the moment decision.”

But an apparent surprise popped up last month, giving opponents some cause to believe the project could still be stopped or altered. The state’s recreation and conservation agency, which heard about the plan from Sciacqua, says the city must replace any park losses with land and amenities of greater or equal value and get permission from the National Park Service, because the Steel Lake Park Annex was created partly with federal funds.

Beleaguered facility

Everyone agrees that Federal Way needs a new operations and maintenance facility for its parks and public works employees sometime soon, considering how bad the conditions at the current facility have become. Located kitty-corner from the Steel Lake Park Annex (and across the street from Steel Lake Park proper, which includes a swimming beach), the property consists of an old fire station, an old house and a parking lot with a steep slope.

The facility’s offices and locker room are a base for more than 60 full-time and seasonal employees who take care of the city’s parks, roads, drainage system and emergency operations. Their trucks are stored at the site, along with other vehicles, equipment like snow plows and mounds of de-icing salt.

In the station, where ceiling tiles have tumbled down, employees assemble for work under dim, blinking lights and make repairs in an outdated garage. The house’s primary bedroom has been converted into an office. In the lot, vehicles are double and triple parked. Thieves have broken in more than 20 times in the past few years, causing more than \$250,000 in expenses.

Some employees have worked out of trucks, sheds and trailers since COVID-19 hit, to avoid workplace crowding. The crews lose precious minutes each day shuffling vehicles around the parking lot to access what they need, “kind of like Tetris,” Walsh said on a recent tour, and costly equipment is stored outside in the rain.

“These are professional people who work hard every day and they deserve better,” Parks Director John Hutton said last summer, urging the City Council to build a new facility at the Steel Lake Park Annex rather than other sites.

In a 2021 report, a consultant hired by the city scored the Steel Lake Park Annex site better than three other options, partly because those options, including the site of the existing facility, would involve buying property in a Federal Way real estate market where prices are high and large parcels are very scarce. To accommodate a larger facility at the existing site, the city would have to purchase and raze some neighboring houses, the report said.

In a memo, the city estimated the price tag for building the new facility at the Steel Lake Park Annex would be at least \$34 million, including \$1 million to mitigate the loss of park amenities — versus at least \$41 million to expand and build at the existing site and even more to build at a different site that would have to be acquired. The estimates didn’t include design costs and debt service.

For Hutton, a longtime parks advocate, removing green space “kind of goes against the handbook,” but the conditions at the existing facility are putting employees in danger, he said last month. At this point, he said, building at Steel Lake Park Annex is the smart thing to do.

“Don’t pave our park”

Not so, argues Suzanne Vargo. Striding through the Steel Lake Park Annex on a blustery winter day, the Federal Way activist bubbled with outrage. The 11 acres look small on a map but larger in person, with a grassy lawn that sprawls between the turf soccer field and a wetland zone.

“Trees are going to go away. Fields are going to go away. They’re going to hide this soccer field” by building around it, said Vargo, arguing that the plan clashes with the city’s growth and sustainability goals.

Seniors visit to exercise, and students take mental health breaks there, crossing into the park directly from the Truman High School campus, an alternative learning community with no sports fields of its own. The Boys & Girls Clubs teen center, which is housed on the campus, uses the park for nature walks and the ballfields to play dodgeball, kickball and flag football, especially in the summer, said Duwayne Le’i, the center’s operations director.

Most kids who spend time at the center can’t afford to join sports teams in organized leagues, so the chance to play for free is important, said Le’i, who praised Federal Way leaders for supporting the center in general, though he didn’t know about the city’s project until contacted by The Seattle Times.

“They’re coming from low-income families. We get a lot of foster kids that we serve. They don’t really have anywhere else to go,” he said.

The City Council meeting in July lasted hours, partly because an unusual number of people shared public comments, mostly asking the council to consider sites other than the Steel Lake Park Annex. Skateboarders described the park as a second home that’s kept kids out of trouble, while others talked about baseball and softball competitions.

“Don’t tear up this nurturing green open space and replace it with loud, rumbling, heavy equipment, electronic warning beeps and engine exhaust right in our backyard,” said Laura Anderson, a Truman High employee who mentioned that students use the Steel Lake Park Annex as a backdrop for their senior photos and other activities. “Please don’t pave our park.”

Two council members, Susan Honda and Linda Kochmar, expressed similar concerns, and a third, Erica Norton, said she was voting “no” because she couldn’t ignore all the public comments. In the subsequent months, a “Save Our Park” online petition racked up hundreds of signatures.

Hovering in the background is Federal Way’s downtown vision, including housing near the light-rail station and the redevelopment of a Target store and parking lot with a public plaza and civic pavilion, a potential hotel and 700-plus apartments.

“I love this city and want to see us have the downtown that people have asked for and dreamed of,” Honda said. “I just don’t think this fits.”

But a council majority voted for the plan, as recommended by Mayor Jim Ferrell, describing the Steel Lake Park Annex site as cost-effective.

“With all the math” pointing to the park as the least expensive option for taxpayers, “I have no choice,” Councilmember Hoang Tran said.

New curveball

The council members who supported the Steel Lake Park Annex plan said they were doing so partly based on mitigation measures in the works. The city will build a walking path around the new facility, construct

a new skatepark, maybe across the street, and will upgrade existing ballfields in a different park, Walsh and Hutton said.

That's why David Waite, the manager of Federal Way's 35th Ave Skateboards store, is ambivalent about the plan. Though he raised hell when he initially heard the city's battered yet busy and beloved skatepark might be destroyed, his stance changed when staff vowed to erect a replacement and created a stakeholder group to design the new venue, inviting Waite to join.

"I'm kind of torn," the veteran skateboarder said. "A new skatepark would do a lot for my business and would help the skate scene."

Foes like Sciacqua and Vargo are less optimistic. They think a new skatepark could cost more than the \$1 million that the city has earmarked for mitigation, and they note the ballfields slated for improvements at Lakota Park are almost 3 miles away, in a more affluent area. The council didn't discuss losing the grass where people can throw Frisbees and picnic today.

Hutton said the Steel Lake Park Annex ballfields are nonessential because leagues that once used them a lot now use other fields more. Perhaps the city should add basketball or pickleball courts, Sciacqua countered.

The deed to the parkland, transferred by King County in 1991, includes a covenant requiring Federal Way to maintain the site as open space or recreational space in perpetuity, or trade it for property of equal or better value. When that came up last summer, Walsh told the council that staff were confident the project could move ahead, partly because the city has added several other parks since 1991. For example, the city built a new Town Square Park on 4 acres in downtown Federal Way in 2014.

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office has thrown a potential curveball at the plan, however, contacting the city last month about federal grants that helped develop the Steel Lake Park Annex. Federal Way must replace whatever gets removed there with parkland and amenities of equivalent value elsewhere — and existing parkland and amenities don't count, said Myra Barker, a compliance specialist with the agency.

So building the new operations and maintenance facility at the Steel Lake Park Annex might not be so cheap after all, Sciacqua and Vargo contend.

The city must work with the state to develop a proposal that the National Park Service will approve or deny, Barker said. Moving ahead without approval would mean violating grant contracts, she said.

The city is "just starting" an environmental review process that will address the grant requirements and various other issues, Walsh said last week. That due diligence must occur before the city can know whether its plan for the Steel Lake Park Annex may evolve, he said.

"There are a lot of questions," Honda said in an interview about the state getting involved. "I think we need to dig into this."

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Abortion rights supporters march in Seattle |
| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/50th-anniversary-roe-v-wade-many-seattle-continue-fight-federal-abortion-rights/RZKU6Z2DEBHERIV5PAYSXZBWZA/ |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — Sunday marked 50 years since the Supreme Court protected federal abortion rights in the famous Roe v. Wade decision. But on Jan. 24, it will have been seven months since the Supreme Court reversed Roe, a decision that rolled back abortion rights across the country.</p> <p>"We are here to say that we won't go back, that we are going to keep the fight up," said Emma Allen with Puget Sound Mobilization of Reproductive Justice.</p> |

In the early afternoon on Sunday, several abortion rights groups gathered in downtown Seattle for a march and rally to commemorate the 50th anniversary as well as voice their concerns with abortion rights going forward. Some organizers say this anniversary is one felt with mixed emotions.

"It's a time for grief. It's a time for anger," Margo Heights said.

An anger they say is still felt months later.

"Because the overturning of abortion rights was totally illegitimate and it's not something people should ever accept or get used to," Heights said.

The march started at St. James Cathedral in Seattle. Organizers say they started at the church because they believe Catholicism has had a harmful impact on abortion rights. The march ended at the corner of 12th Avenue and East James Court near Seattle University. Many in Sunday's crowd believe Roe v. Wade was about more than abortion.

"Not just abortion rights, but reproductive rights. Whether it be birth control, whether it be the right to bodily autonomy in all forms, especially trans rights," Allen said.

They hope to see more people fight for abortion rights.

"People need to be continuing to fight for abortion rights. This can't be a decades and decades long struggle to get this right back," Heights said.

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/22 Thurston Co. house fire kills 5 |
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| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/thurston-county-fire-kills-five-family-members-including-3-children |
| GIST | <p>OLYMPIA, Wash. - Investigators say a deadly fire in Western Washington claimed the lives of five family members early Saturday morning, including three children.</p> <p>The Thurston County Sheriff's Office says it happened at around 6:30 am, off Sherman Valley Rd SW on a rural property.</p> <p>"It brings a tear to our eye just to think about the fact, you could lose kids, much less an entire family," said neighbor Ken Smith. "My grandson went to school with their youngest and there are a couple of middle-schoolers over there."</p> <p>Smith lives across the road from the mom, dad and three younger children that lost their lives.</p> <p>"I saw the kids out there all the time, getting off the bus, on the bus. Real good quiet neighbors. It's a shame to have lost them. We're heartbroken," he said.</p> <p>Lt. Cameron Simper with the Thurston County Sheriff's Office says the family lived in a home that was attached to a barn. Before the pandemic, neighbors said the family rented out space for events like weddings on the property under the name "Sherman Valley Ranch".</p> <p>Lt. Simper says the home also sat on a larger "family property" where the grandparents also lived. He said the closest neighbors are family members, and they were the first to call 911.</p> <p>"This was called in by a neighbor who saw the flames and heard the screams, the calls for help," said Lt. Simper. "When the firefighters arrived, the residence was fully engulfed in flames."</p> <p>Lt. Simper said a girl that was staying at the house as a visitor was the only one in the home at the time who made it out alive, by escaping to the roof.</p> |

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| | <p>"She climbed out onto the roof of the second story," said Lt. Simper.</p> <p>He says the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives was called upon by fire crews to help investigate because of the large loss of life. So far, he says it's too early to determine a cause. Because there are no fire hydrants in the rural area, it did prompt a large fire response.</p> <p>"There were departments from virtually all over Thurston County, and even into Grays Harbor County, that brought their tenders, as you can see, there are no hydrants in this area, so the water that was used to fight this fire had to be brought in on trucks," said Lt. Simper.</p> <p>"Kids were always outside playing and enjoying life. Wonderful neighbors, they have all kinds of animals and the kids play outside. It's going to be tough on the whole neighborhood," said Smith. "I have got believe this is the worst tragedy in Thurston County in years. I just haven't heard of anything this bad."</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 LAPD chief bans public 'thin blue line' flags |
| SOURCE | https://ktla.com/news/lapd-chief-bans-department-displays-of-thin-blue-line-flag/ |
| GIST | <p>Los Angeles Police Department Chief Michel Moore has issued a ban on displaying the "thin blue line" flag at public events and station lobbies.</p> <p>The Saturday mandate comes in response to the flag's divisive symbolism, with some believing it represents support for law enforcement while others saying it's become a symbol of far-right ideology and white supremacy.</p> <p>Moore has also prohibited any use of the thin blue line patch on officer uniforms or bumper stickers on police vehicles.</p> <p>Displaying the flag on non-public property such as an officer's locker, personal workspace or personal vehicle is still allowed, officials said.</p> <p>The flag in question is a black-and-white colored U.S. flag with a single blue stripe in the middle.</p> <p>Moore released a statement on the decision saying:</p> <p>"Earlier this week there was a member of the public that complained of a 'Thin Blue Line Flag' being displayed over the front desk of Rampart Station. The complaint stems from their belief the symbol signifies support of extremist views such as those espoused by the Proud Boys and others. I directed to have the item taken down from the public lobby.</p> <p>While I do not personally view the 'Thin Blue Line Flag' in the same manner as the community member and others, its display in our public lobbies can be divisive.</p> <p>It's unfortunate that extremist groups have hijacked the use of the 'Thin Blue Line Flag' to symbolize their undemocratic, racist, and bigoted views. Flags serve as powerful symbols with specific meanings. The 'Thin Blue Line Flag' to me presents the honor, valor, dedication, and sacrifice of law enforcement to protect our communities. Tragically, that view is not universally held and others have been able to persuade the public it symbolizes racist, bigoted and oppressive values.</p> <p>Given our lobbies should be places that people feel safe, free of political ideology, and welcoming, it remains our long-standing policy that only official items be displayed.</p> <p>I understand the frustration some may feel on this issue with an accompanying sense of a lack of support of their dedication on my part. I'm mindful of the Los Angeles Police Protective League's (LAPPL)</p> |

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| | expressed disappointment in my directive. My commitment to you is unwavering as I strive each day to protect and serve you as well as the people of Los Angeles.” |
| Return to Top | |

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Spokane homeless shelter capacity? |
| SOURCE | https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2023/jan/22/what-is-spokanes-homeless-shelter-capacity-and-why/ |
| GIST | <p>Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward has said for months the city could immediately provide shelter for everyone living at Camp Hope.</p> <p>“We have a safe place for people that’s warm, that’s a bed, that’s three meals a day and access to showers,” she said in early October. “People don’t have to be freezing in tents.”</p> <p>The Washington State Department of Transportation, which owns the Camp Hope property in east Spokane, has repeatedly said the city couldn’t immediately house everyone living there.</p> <p>“There simply isn’t enough housing options to either meet the encampment or overall need at this time,” the department wrote in a December news release.</p> <p>Spokane has a finite number of homeless shelter beds. According to a city-run dashboard on sheltermespokane.org, the city has 1,082 beds available spread across 11 shelters, including 350 at the Trent Resource and Assistance Center.</p> <p>Yet debate over Spokane’s true shelter capacity continues.</p> <p>“We don’t even seem to agree what capacity means,” said Jeffry Finer, a civil rights attorney who is fighting the city and county’s efforts to clear Camp Hope before its residents can be resettled.</p> <p>Until recently, Woodward refused to place a hard limit on the city’s maximum shelter capacity. She now says the Trent Avenue shelter, operated by the Salvation Army, could house 688 people if necessary. That would bring the city’s emergency capacity to 1,420 based on the figures listed on sheltermespokane.org.</p> <p>City spokesman Brian Coddington said shelter capacity is difficult to quantify.</p> <p>“Flex capacity by nature is flexible,” he said.</p> <p>Some question the feasibility of fitting 688 people into the Trent shelter. Salvation Army spokesman Brian Pickering said he couldn’t discuss whether the organization is capable of operating the facility if more than 600 people are using it.</p> <p>“I’m personally skeptical of having much more than 250 in one place because of health concerns,” Spokane City Council President Breean Beggs said. “But at the same time, we’ve got to get people out of the cold, the heat, whatever it is.”</p> <p>The disagreement over shelter capacity makes more sense when viewed in a legal context.</p> <p>In 2018, the U.S. District Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit ruled that cities cannot prohibit camping on public property unless shelter is available.</p> <p>The Martin v. Boise ruling allows for exceptions, but it often presents an obstacle for local governments seeking to remove tent cities. Evicting campers from public property without offering them a bed can be legally risky.</p> <p>“Until there’s capacity to house, you cannot criminalize or use nuisance laws to chase after people who are homeless,” Finer said.</p> |

If Spokane clearly lacked shelter capacity, Finer said, sweeping Camp Hope would be an impossibility.

“If it’s murky,” he said. “The option exists.”

The 9th Circuit ruling gives cities “a strong motivation” to argue they have capacity, Finer said.

Woodward has made that argument since the city in September opened the Trent Resource and Assistance Center and Spokane’s shelter capacity grew dramatically. She began strongly pushing for the camp’s closure soon after the Trent shelter opened and even threatened to sue the Department of Transportation if it wasn’t closed by Oct. 14.

“If we have a bed to direct someone to, then we should be able to remove people out of an insidious encampment that is having an incredibly negative impact on the neighborhood and has for over a year,” Woodward said in an interview last week.

In recent federal court filings, the city argued that Camp Hope could be closed without violating the 9th Circuit’s ruling and did not appear to argue that it had capacity to house the tent city’s residents.

Some homeless advocates say the city didn’t have nearly enough capacity this fall to house people living at Camp Hope.

“Absolutely, absolutely not,” said Barry Barfield, administrator of the Spokane Homeless Coalition. “Absolutely, 100% not.”

An evolving shelter network

The question of how many people can be absorbed by the Spokane shelter system is becoming increasingly salient as the population of Camp Hope homeless dwindles. On Thursday, officials from the state Department of Transportation stated that less than 140 people remained, down from more than 600 last summer.

The recently opened Catalyst project, a former hotel converted into transitional housing for the homeless, can reportedly take in upward of 50 people from Camp Hope, which could drop the camp’s population to fewer than 100. Depending on the number of beds available in the shelter system, the city could soon be within striking distance of being able to relocate everyone staying at Camp Hope, which would be a major political victory for the Woodward administration. On Thursday afternoon, sheltermespokane.org listed 150 shelter beds available, although not all of those are open for all people.

Since it opened in September, the capacity of the Trent shelter has expanded well beyond the limits in the current contract with the Salvation Army and beyond what the city budgeted. From original projections in early 2022 that the shelter would house up to 120 people, the number of beds grew to 150, then 250, then 350, with emergency capacity for up to 450.

Woodward has insisted the capacity of the Trent shelter could be expanded even beyond 450 beds, pointing to building officials who have said the shelter could hold as many as 688 people, though not without additional staffing and utilities, such as bathrooms. City Administrator Johnnie Perkins also told council members in December that this was a legal maximum, but that there were no plans to put that many occupants in the Trent facility.

Yet, when asked whether the city could provide shelter to the residents of Camp Hope and shutter the encampment, Woodward has leaned on that 688 number to argue that the capacity exists.

Some homeless service providers call this claim and the shifting shelter bed numbers a politically convenient way to justify ramping up law enforcement against the homeless.

“I think she wants to be re-elected and it serves her image to not have a hard number, to be able to move around and have some wiggle room,” Barfield said of Woodward. “Her conservative base really wants her to be able to move somebody off a sidewalk.”

Coddington flatly rejected that characterization.

“Politics have nothing to do with it,” he said. “It’s about finding spaces for people to get out of the weather. Bottom line, our priority is helping people, and a considerable amount of time, energy and resources have been spent to do that.”

Woodward’s record and rhetoric

In her bid to become mayor, Woodward presented herself as the candidate to solve the visible issue of homelessness and prevent problems like those depicted in a controversial “Seattle is Dying” TV news report aired on KOMO in Seattle.

Unlike her general election opponent, then-Council President Ben Stuckart, Woodward stressed accountability, increased law enforcement and long-term solutions, rather than shelters with few restrictions on guests like the one now located on East Trent.

Woodward criticized the shelter-first approach to homelessness, saying in a political forum that “we have to get beyond warehousing people and handing out sandwiches.”

At the time, she proposed the city wait out the conclusion of the appeals to *Martin v. Boise*.

But in 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of the case, allowing the precedent to remain the law of the land within the 9th Circuit, which includes Washington.

Police continued to issue citations. An Inlander report in late 2020 found that city police issued 30 citations for violating its sit-lie ordinance – a prohibition against sitting or lying on a public sidewalk – or illegal camping since November 2019, even though shelter space wasn’t available at the time.

Law enforcement pulled back, focusing instead on finding ways to clean up hot spots while avoiding the restrictions created by the appeals court. The city was forced to lean on “interference with pedestrian or vehicular traffic” and other charges, in part because they don’t come with the same shelter capacity requirements as its sit-lie ordinance, which was no longer being enforced.

The administration also launched some shelter services during this period, though Woodward faced criticism at the time for a lack of emphasis on low-barrier beds that could be accessed by any homeless person.

By late 2021, Woodward stated publicly that her philosophy had changed. The Cannon Street Shelter had opened, which today provides 80 low-barrier beds for men and women. The mayor’s proposed 2022 budget included a provision for what eventually would become the Trent Resource and Assistance Center.

Amid this shift in priorities, a tent city called Camp Hope formed outside of City Hall in December 2021 to protest a lack of low-barrier beds. After the protest was disbanded, its members moved to land near Interstate 90 owned by the state Department of Transportation.

Since then, the Trent shelter has come online, expanding from the 120 beds initially proposed to 350. More than 300 people stayed in the Trent shelter Thursday night.

Immediately after the Trent shelter opened, the city announced it would resume enforcing sit-lie ordinances, pointing to the new bed space as justification.

“We are setting an expectation that individuals take advantage of the opportunities available to them to receive services in a safe, healthy, and humane environment,” Woodward said in a statement published by

the city. “Our downtown needs to be a safe and healthy place for everyone and living on streets, alleyways, viaducts, and fields is not in anyone’s best interest.”

An expanded system

Despite the ongoing debate over Spokane’s shelter capacity, there are more beds today than there were when Woodward took office. In an interview, she estimated that 500 low-barrier shelter beds have been created during her tenure.

“Last night, 500 people spent the night in a safe, warm, indoor environment, were fed, and had access to services,” Coddington wrote in a text Friday. “They had that option because Mayor Woodward supported and led partnerships to add those spaces.

“Those choices have rarely been popular and more often than not met with considerable criticism. However, she did it because helping people move out of the elements and closer to a permanent housing solution is the right and humane thing to do.”

On Thursday night, there were 150 beds open out of the nearly 1,100 throughout the shelter system within city limits.

Not every bed is created equal, though.

Jewels Helping Hands Executive Director Julie Garcia, whose organization helps provide services to Camp Hope’s residents, explained that each shelter comes with its own restrictions.

“There are a handful of beds in our system, but they are beds that are specific to specific groups of people,” Garcia said.

Some of Spokane’s shelters offer space exclusively to men. Others cater to women, teens, families or individuals fleeing domestic violence. The Union Gospel Mission’s shelters are referred to as “high-barrier” facilities because they impose sobriety requirements on their guests.

Of the 150 beds available on Thursday, more than a third were high-barrier. The city had 61 low-barrier beds available to adult men.

Several of the city’s shelters are continuously full. Joe Ader, executive director of Family Promise, said his organization’s facility is one of them. Family Promise is the only shelter that provides space for families with children.

“We have been operating at capacity since July and even a little bit over,” Ader said.

Among low-barrier shelters, the Trent Resource and Assistance Center often has the most room.

On Thursday, its 42 unoccupied beds accounted for more than two-thirds of the capacity open to adult men and women.

The capacity at the Trent shelter has ballooned over time.

The original Trent shelter proposal was for 60 two-person pods, but by the time the shelter opened on Sept. 6, its capacity was increased to 150 bunks, with the capacity to flex up to 250, according to the city. Mike Shaw, CEO of the Guardians Foundation, which operated the shelter at the time, stated that another 200-300 mats could be used to flex capacity further.

By November, when the Salvation Army began operating the Trent shelter, that facility was averaging 280 guests per night. In all, there were 250 wooden beds available, with 100 floor mats for overflow, according to city officials.

From the beginning, city officials have relied heavily on the Trent shelter to handle most of the homeless population once Camp Hope is closed. Even when the population of Camp Hope was over 440 people this fall, the administration claimed the capacity existed to house its residents.

“In theory, you could put everybody in there,” Coddington said on Sept. 27. “That’s not ideal; that’s not the city’s desire.”

“We can provide a lot more space at Trent, and we have other shelters within the regional shelter system that can expand as well,” Woodward said at the time.

In a Thursday interview, Coddington clarified that the situation was in flux shortly after the Trent shelter opened, and that additional housing options such as the Catalyst Project were expected to come online sooner than they have. There also were ongoing questions about whether Camp Hope contained as many people as had been reported.

The city was justified in stating at the time that shelter existed for everyone at Camp Hope, Coddington said.

Since the Trent shelter opened, Spokane County has pitched in \$500,000 to replace the facility’s 250 wood-framed beds, which city officials have acknowledged were prone to breakage and infestation, with 350 metal beds.

Salvation Army Executive Director Maj. Ken Perine said in November that continuing to provide 100 overflow mats, for a total capacity of 450 sleeping areas, would take up too much room and interfere with the facility’s services.

Woodward, however, has repeatedly maintained that no one will be turned away from the shelter, and during a recent cold snap the population surged above 350.

Not long after the Trent shelter opened, city and county leaders increased pressure for the rapid closure of the camp before the start of winter. Spokane Police Chief Craig Meidl and then-Spokane County Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich threatened to arrest those who did not voluntarily leave.

In October, the Spokane Police Department warned the Department of Transportation that the camp was violating the city’s nuisance law. In response, state Transportation Secretary Roger Millar threatened legal action if the complaint was not rescinded and questioned whether there was enough shelter space for the camp to be cleared without running afoul of *Martin v. Boise*.

“Ignoring these complex considerations, the City’s administration has instead recently made vague assertions that it may go in and clean out the encampment, in apparent blatant disregard of the potential legal implications of such an action,” Millar wrote.

A point made moot?

Amid months of politicized debate over whether Camp Hope could truly be emptied out into Spokane’s shelter system, the encampment’s population has plummeted.

With less than 150 people remaining at the camp, there are more beds in the shelter system than residents remaining at Camp Hope, although not all of those beds are low-barrier and open to adults. An additional 50 housing units for residents of Camp Hope also are expected to come online in the near future, Coddington said.

A continued frustration for city officials, Coddington said, is that they have not been provided demographic data for those still living at the camp, which makes it difficult to know if all of those remaining can be placed in the beds available.

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| | <p>“Until we have the demographic breakdown and know for certainty who is there, it’s equally unfair to make the assumption that there isn’t space for people,” he said.</p> <p>The next steps to close Camp Hope might not be easy ones. The people still living at Camp Hope could be the hardest to house, Finer said.</p> <p>Of the more than 600 people that once called the encampment home, the easiest ones to place in shelters or housing already have been placed, he said. The ones who remain often have disabilities, he added.</p> <p>“As the easy, cherry-picked ones leave, the group that’s left is the hard core,” Finer said. “They’re going to be very hard to place.”</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 China: Covid infected 80% of population |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/21/china-says-covid-outbreak-has-infected-80percent-of-population.html |
| GIST | <p>The possibility of a big Covid-19 rebound in China over the next two or three months is remote as 80% of people have been infected, a prominent government scientist said on Saturday.</p> <p>The mass movement of people during the ongoing Lunar New Year holiday period may spread the pandemic, boosting infections in some areas, but a second Covid wave is unlikely in the near term, Wu Zunyou, chief epidemiologist at the China Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said on the Weibo social media platform.</p> <p>Hundreds of millions of Chinese are traveling across the country for holiday reunions that had been suspended under recently eased Covid curbs, raising fears of fresh outbreaks in rural areas less equipped to manage large outbreaks.</p> <p>China has passed the peak of Covid patients in fever clinics, emergency rooms and with critical conditions, a National Health Commission official said on Thursday.</p> <p>Nearly 60,000 people with Covid had died in hospital as of Jan. 12, roughly a month after China abruptly dismantled its zero-Covid policy, according to government data.</p> <p>But some experts said that figure probably vastly undercounts the full impact, as it excludes those who die at home, and because many doctors have said they are discouraged from citing Covid as a cause of death.</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Real life ‘Top Gun’ kept secret for 50yrs |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/20/asia/korean-war-fighter-pilot-soviet-shootdown-intl-hnk-ml/index.html |
| GIST | <p>Royce Williams was a real-life “Top Gun” 10 years before Tom Cruise was even born.</p> <p>On a cold November day in 1952, Williams shot down four Soviet fighter jets – and became a legend no one would hear about for more than 50 years.</p> <p>The now 97-year-old former naval aviator was presented with the Navy Cross, the service’s second-highest military honor at a ceremony Friday in California.</p> <p>Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said on Friday that among the many proposals he has reviewed to upgrade sailors’ awards, Williams’ case “stood out above all others. It was very clear to me that his actions were truly extraordinary and more closely aligned with the criteria describing a higher medal.”</p> <p>“Freedom does not come cheap,” Del Toro said. “It comes through the sacrifice of all those who have and continue to serve in today’s military. Your actions that day kept you free. They kept your shipmates free in Task Force 77. Indeed, they kept all of us free.”</p> |

Here's what Williams did to earn that honor.

Outnumbered and outgunned

On November 18, 1952, Williams was flying the F9F Panther – the US Navy's first jet fighter – on a mission during the Korean War.

He took off from the aircraft carrier USS Oriskany, which was operating with three other carriers in a task force in the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea, 100 miles off the coast of North Korea.

Williams, then age 27, and three other fighter pilots were ordered on a combat air patrol over the most northern part of the Korean Peninsula, near the Yalu River, which separates North Korea from China. To the northeast is Russia, then part of the Soviet Union, which supported North Korea in the conflict.

As the four US Navy jets flew their patrol, the group's leader suffered mechanical problems and with his wingman, headed back to the task force off the coast.

That left Williams and his wingman alone on the mission.

Then, to their surprise, seven Soviet MiG-15 fighter jets were identified heading toward the US task force.

"They just didn't come out of Russia and engage us in any way before," Williams said in a 2021 interview with the American Veterans Center.

Wary commanders in the task force ordered the two US Navy jets to put themselves between the MiGs and the US warships.

While doing this, four of the Soviet MiGs turned toward Williams and opened fire, he recalled.

He said he fired on the tail MiG, which then dropped out of the four-plane Soviet formation, with Williams' wingman following the Soviet jet down.

At that point, US commanders on the carrier ordered him not to engage the Soviets, he said.

"I said, 'I am engaged,'" Williams recalled in the interview.

No choice but to fight

Williams said he also knew that because the Soviet jets were faster than his, if he tried to break off they'd catch and kill him.

"At that time the MiG-15 was the best fighter airplane in the world," faster and able to climb and dive quicker than the American jets, he said in the interview.

His plane was suited to air-to-ground combat, not aerial dogfights, he said.

But now he was in one, with not just one, but six Soviet jets as the other three MiGs that broke off earlier returned.

What ensued was more than a half-hour of aerial combat, with Williams constantly turning and weaving – the one area where the F9F could compete with the Soviet aircraft – to not let the superior MiGs get their guns fixed on him.

"I was on automatic, I was doing as trained," he said.

So were the Soviets.

"But on some occasions ... they made mistakes," Williams said.

One flew at him, but then stopped firing and dipped under him. Williams figured its pilot was killed by his gunfire.

And he described how another MiG got right in front of him, he hit it with his gunfire, and it disintegrated, causing Williams to maneuver sharply to avoid the wreckage and its pilot as the plane came apart.

Over the course of the fight, Williams fired all 760 rounds of 20mm cannon shells the F9F carried, according to an account of the engagement from the US Navy Memorial's website.

But the Soviets scored hits on Williams, too, disabling his rudder and wing control surfaces, leaving only the elevators in the rear of the plane viable for him to move the jet up and down.

Luckily, he said, at this point he was heading in the direction of the US task force off the coast. But one of the remaining Soviet jets was still on his tail.

He said he flew in an up-and-down roller coaster pattern, with bullets flying above and below him as he moved, the Soviet pilot trying to get a clear shot.

Williams' wingman rejoined the fight at this point, getting on the Soviet's tail and scaring him off, according to the Navy Memorial account.

But Williams still had some difficult flying to do to get the damaged jet back on board the carrier.

First, with the task force wary of Soviet warplanes possibly attacking it, its heightened air defenses initially thought Williams' F9F was a MiG, and destroyers guarding the American carriers opened fire on him.

Williams said his commander quickly put a stop to that, eliminating one danger.

Still, Williams had to get his jet on the deck on the carrier, something he'd usually do at an airspeed of 105 knots (120 mph). But he already knew if he went lower than 170 knots (195 mph), his aircraft would stall and plunge into the icy sea.

And he couldn't turn to line up with the carrier. So the ship's captain decided to take the extraordinary step of turning the carrier to line up with Williams.

It worked. He slammed onto the deck and caught the third and final arresting wire.

On the deck on the carrier, Navy crew counted 263 holes in Williams' plane. It was in such poor shape, it was pushed off the ship into the sea, according to the Navy Memorial account.

But as the plane disappeared below the waves, something else had to also – the fact that the US-Soviet aerial combat happened at all.

Fear of another world war

News of Williams' heroics went all the way to the top, with then-President Dwight Eisenhower among the senior US officials eager to speak to the pilot, according to the Navy Memorial's website.

“Following the battle, Williams was personally interviewed by several high-ranking Navy admirals, the Secretary of Defense, and also the President, after which he was instructed to not talk about his engagement as officials feared the incident might cause a devastating increase of tensions between the US and Soviet Union, and possibly ignite World War Three,” the website says.

A US Defense Department account of the incident also notes that US forces were trying out new communications intercept equipment that day. It was feared that revealing the Soviet role in the combat would have compromised that US' advantage.

The records of Williams' dogfight were promptly classified by US officials and he was sworn to secrecy, meaning it would take more than five decades before his victories could be fully recognized.

In 1953, Williams was awarded a Silver Star, but the citation made no reference to Soviet aircraft, just "enemy" ones. And it only mentioned three kills. The fourth was not known until Russian records were released in the 1990s, the website says.

So it was not until 2002, when the records were declassified, that Williams could even tell those closest to him.

"For the rest of his accomplished Navy career, and for decades after retirement, the details of Williams' dogfight with Soviet MiGs over North Korea remained a secret," according to the US Defense Department.

"When he was finally contacted by the government and told his mission was declassified, the first person Williams said he told was his wife."

In the following years, veterans groups who learned what he did said the Silver Star was insufficient reward for Williams, with some saying he should get the military's highest award – the Medal of Honor.

In December last year, more than 70 years after the Korean War aerial battle, Del Toro said Williams' Silver Star should be upgraded to the Navy Cross.

California Rep. Darrell Issa, who pushed for Williams to get the upgraded medal, called him "a Top Gun pilot like no other, and an American hero for all time."

"It is to this day the most unique US-Soviet aerial combat dogfight in the history of the Cold War," Issa said in a statement.

"The heroism and valor he demonstrated for 35 harrowing minutes 70 years ago in the skies over the North Pacific and the coast of North Korea saved the lives of his fellow pilots, shipmates, and crew. His story is one for the ages, but is now being fully told."

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Burkina Faso govt orders French troops out |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/burkina-faso-ends-ties-french-troops-orders-departure-96587649 |
| GIST | <p>OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso -- Burkina Faso's junta government late Saturday ordered hundreds of French troops to depart the West African country within a month, following in the path of neighboring Mali, whose nation is also headed by a coup leader.</p> <p>National broadcaster RTB made the announcement, citing the official Agence d'Information du Burkina. The news agency said the decision had been made Wednesday to end the presence of France's military on Burkinabe soil.</p> <p>Protesters took to the streets of the capital, Ouagadougou, last week to call for the ouster of the French ambassador and the closure of a French military base north of the capital. About 400 French special forces soldiers are currently based there, France 24 reported.</p> |

The move by Burkina Faso's regime comes five months after France completed its withdrawal from Mali after nine years fighting Islamic extremists alongside regional troops. Many of those are now based in Niger and Chad instead.

While the number of French troops in Burkina Faso is far smaller than it was in Mali — 400 special forces, compared to more than 2,400 soldiers — Saturday's announcement adds to the growing concerns that Islamic extremists are capitalizing on the political disarray and using it to expand their reach. Analysts have questioned whether the national militaries of Burkina Faso and Mali are capable of filling in the void.

More than 60 years after Burkina Faso's independence, French remains an official language and France has maintained strong economic and humanitarian aid ties with its former colony. As the Islamic extremist insurgency has deepened, however, anti-French sentiment has spiked due in part to the unabating violence.

After the second coup there last year, anti-French protesters began urging the junta to instead strengthen ties with Russia. Mali already has hired Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group, who have been accused of widespread human rights abuses there and elsewhere.

Saturday's announcement was welcomed by those who had lost patience with France.

"Despite their presence on Burkinabe soil with huge equipment and their power at the intelligence level, they couldn't help us defeat terrorism," said Passamde Sawadogo, a prominent civil society activist and reggae singer. "It therefore was time for us to get rid of them, and that's what the transition government is doing with a lot of boldness."

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Russia officials warns about arming Ukraine |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-official-warns-west-destruction-arming-ukraine-96594819 |
| GIST | <p>KYIV, Ukraine -- The speaker of Russia's parliament warned Sunday that countries supplying Ukraine with more powerful weapons risked their own destruction, a message that followed new pledges of armored vehicles, air defense systems and other equipment but not the battle tanks Kyiv requested.</p> <p>"Supplies of offensive weapons to the Kyiv regime would lead to a global catastrophe," State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin said. "If Washington and NATO supply weapons that would be used for striking peaceful cities and making attempts to seize our territory as they threaten to do, it would trigger a retaliation with more powerful weapons."</p> <p>Ukraine's supporters pledged billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine on Friday, though the new commitments were overshadowed by defense leaders failing at an international meeting in Ramstein, Germany, to agree on Ukraine's urgent request for German-made Leopard 2 battle tanks.</p> <p>Germany is one of the main donors of weapons to Ukraine, and it ordered a review of its Leopard 2 stocks in preparation for a possible green light. Nonetheless, the government in Berlin has shown caution at each step of increasing its commitments to Ukraine, a hesitancy seen as rooted in its history and political culture.</p> <p>Its tentativeness has drawn heavy criticism, particularly from Poland and the Baltic states, countries on NATO's eastern flank controlled by Moscow in the past and feel especially threatened by Russia's renewed imperial ambitions.</p> <p>Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said that if Germany does not consent to transferring Leopard tanks to Ukraine, his country was prepared to build a coalition of countries that would send theirs anyway.</p> <p>"Almost a year had passed since the outbreak of war," Morawiecki said in an interview with Polish state news agency PAP published Sunday. "Evidence of the Russian army's war crimes can be seen on</p> |

television and on YouTube. What more does Germany need to open its eyes and start to act in line with the potential of the German state?"

"Above all, Berlin should not weaken or sabotage the activities of other countries," Morawiecki said.

In Washington, two leading lawmakers urged the U.S. on Sunday to send some of its Abrams tanks to Ukraine, in the interests of overcoming Germany's reluctance to share its own, more suitable Leopard 2 tanks.

"If we announced we were giving an Abrams tank, just one, that would unleash" the flow of tanks from Germany, Rep. Michael McCaul, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told ABC's "This Week on Sunday." "What I hear is that Germany's waiting on us to take the lead."

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of the Russian Security Council, said the meeting in Ramstein "left no doubt that our enemies will try to exhaust or better destroy us," adding that "they have enough weapons" to achieve the purpose.

Medvedev, a former Russian president, warned on his messaging app channel that Russia could seek to form a military alliance with foes of the United States. He didn't name the nations he had in mind, but Russia has defense cooperation with Iran and Venezuela, an existing military alliance with Belarus and strong ties with North Korea.. Since invading Ukraine, Russia also has increased both the scope and the number of its joint military drills with China.

"In case of a protracted conflict, a new military alliance will emerge that will include the nations that are fed up with the Americans and a pack of their castrated dogs," Medvedev said.

Ukraine is asking for more weapons as it anticipates Russia's forces launching a new offensive in the spring.

Oleksii Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's Security and Defense Council, warned that Russia may try to intensify its attacks in the south and in the east and to cut supply channels of Western weapons, while conquering Kyiv "remains the main dream" in President Vladimir Putin's "fantasies," he said.

He described the Kremlin's goal in the conflict as a "total and absolute genocide, a total war of destruction."

"Moscow wants to completely destroy Ukraine as a historical phenomenon — its language, history, culture, carriers of Ukrainian identity," Danilov wrote in a column published by Ukrainska Pravda.

Among those calling for more arms for Ukraine was the former British prime minister, Boris Johnson, who made a surprise trip to Ukraine on Sunday.

"This is the moment to double down and to give the Ukrainians all the tools they need to finish the job. The sooner Putin fails, the better for Ukraine and for the whole world," Johnson said in a statement.

Johnson, who faces fresh questions at home over his personal finances, was pictured in the Kyiv region town of Borodyanka. He said he traveled to Ukraine at the invitation of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The last week was especially tragic for Ukraine even by the standards of a brutal war that has gone on for nearly a year, killing tens of thousands of people, uprooting millions more and creating vast destruction of Ukrainian cities.

A barrage of Russian missiles struck an apartment complex in the southeastern city of Dnipro on Jan. 14, killing at least 45 civilians, including six children. On Wednesday, a government helicopter carrying the interior minister and other officials crashed into a building housing a kindergarten in a suburb of Kyiv. The minister and a child on the ground were among the 14 people killed.

Zelenskyy, who on Saturday mourned the victims of the helicopter crash, vowed Sunday that Ukraine would prevail in the war.

“We are united because we are strong. We are strong because we are united,” the Ukrainian leader said in a video address as he marked Ukraine Unity Day, which commemorates the day in 1919 when East and West Ukraine were united.

“Dear invincible people, Happy Ukrainian Unity Day!” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Fastest-growing food retailer? Dollar stores |
| SOURCE | https://www.vice.com/en/article/5d3v85/dollar-stores-are-the-fastest-growing-food-retailers-in-us-study-finds |
| GIST | <p>Most Americans are struggling to find cheaply-priced eggs and other groceries, but their options for where to buy them have also been shrinking over the years.</p> <p>A study published on Thursday in the <i>American Journal of Public Health</i> looked at data from 50,000 households collected between 2008-2020, looking at trends in household food purchases by type of store. What they found is that a smaller share of food purchases are being done at grocery stores, and a growing amount of food is bought at dollar stores, as well as larger shopping centers and department stores.</p> <p>While dollar stores are still nowhere close to the share of household food purchases of grocery stores, they drew particular alarm from researchers because of the rate at which they’re growing and their lack of fresh food options. Researchers said dollar stores, “offer foods that are mostly packaged, shelf-stable, higher in calories, and lower in nutrients.”</p> <p>According to the study, households spent an average 62.3 percent of their food budget in traditional grocery stores in 2008, which decreased to 58.3 percent by 2020. Most of that difference was made up by club stores like Costco, which require a membership and where customers typically buy in bulk. Their total share of Americans’ household food budgets increased by 2.4 percent. This was followed by supercenters (think Walmart) which increased their share by 1.5 percent, and dollar stores, which increased their share by 1 percent. While that might not sound ominous, researchers said “dollar stores were the fastest growing retail channel,” for food purchases, with an 89.7 percent increase between 2008-2020.</p> <p>The trends varied by region: Southern households spent the most on food in dollar stores, households in the West coast spent the least. And “rural non-Hispanic Black” shoppers spent 11.6 percent of their food budgets in dollar stores, the most of any demographic group in the data</p> <p>The growth was more pronounced in rural areas, where Dollar Stores increased their share of household food purchases by 102.9 percent. Much of that growth was attributed to two large chains, Dollar General and Dollar Tree (which owns another large chain, Family Dollar). Dollar General alone opened 1100 retail locations last year and plans to open another 1050 this year. An analyst told The Wall Street Journal in December that dollar stores thrive in rural areas because “They really can outcompete the local grocer in a smaller market.”</p> <p>“On the one hand, dollar stores may challenge and force out local grocers through competitive pricing, leaving consumers with limited, less-healthy food options,” one of the study’s authors, Wenhui Feng, Tufts Health Plan Professor of Health Care Policy wrote Motherboard. “On the other hand, in some places, local grocers may not have enough business to support maintaining a store, or that grocery stores’ consolidation may leave residents with less food options. In these cases, dollar stores may be the only option in terms of food access.”</p> |

When supercenters began taking over a larger portion of peoples' food budgets, there was a similar concern about a lack of healthy food options, Feng said, but, "Over the years, as supercenters offered a larger variety of foods, such concerns subsided."

Dollar General claimed to have more physical locations than any other retail outlet in the U.S, according to a December earnings call. Facing criticism for taking advantage of food deserts, Dollar General's CEO said that the chain already sold fresh produce in 3,000 of their over [18,000 stores, and plans to up that number to over 10,000](#)

According to [Forbes](#), a big reason more consumers are buying their groceries at dollar stores is their ubiquity, which factors into costs of living: residents who may prefer grocery stores can't afford the gas costs if they have to drive 20 miles to a grocery store, but there's a dollar store nearby. There is a Dollar General within 5 miles of 75 percent of the U.S. population, according to [Forbes](#). The outlet said Dollar General uses an algorithm to propose new locations, which takes into account population density and traffic patterns.

Some cities have been cracking down on the expansion of dollar stores, concerned about growing food deserts.

The City of Birmingham, Alabama [banned new dollar stores opening](#) within one mile of an existing one. They also allocated [\\$500,000](#) to spur the development of new grocery stores. Forth Worth, Texas [requires new dollar stores to be at least 2 miles](#) from an existing store and requires that they devote 10 percent of their floor area to fresh food. [DeKalb County, Georgia established a moratorium](#) on new dollar stores that has been in effect since December 2019. According to the [Institute for Local Self-Reliance](#), there are also restrictions on dollar stores in Kansas City, Kansas; New Orleans, Louisiana; Akron, Ohio; and Oklahoma City and Tulsa in Oklahoma.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Covid, flu, RSV 'triple-demic' threat fades |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2023/01/22/covid-declining-flu-rsv-triple-demic/ |
| GIST | <p>So many patients sick with RSV had inundated Connecticut Children's Medical Center that they had to be treated in hallways and playrooms. Facing their busiest season in memory last fall, hospital leaders floated a plan to enlist the National Guard to set up tents outside. Doctors braced for a dire winter — a looming disaster some dubbed a "triple-demic" — with flu season revving up, coronavirus roaring back and the holidays providing fuel for viruses to spread.</p> <p>But no such surge materialized. The RSV wave has receded in Connecticut and across the country. Flu cases have rapidly dwindled. Covid hospitalizations rose briefly after Christmas, only to fall again.</p> <p>"We are seeing the normal busy, but not the very busy that I thought we would see," said Juan Salazar, physician-in-chief at Connecticut Children's in Hartford. "I'm just so pleased we are now able to be back to normal staffing. Busy staffing, but not anything near to what we saw in the fall."</p> <p>It turns out that early waves of respiratory syncytial virus and influenza peaked before the new year, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And the expected winter uptick of coronavirus is nowhere close to overwhelming hospitals, as it did in 2021 when covid wards were filled with unvaccinated people struggling to breathe and last winter when the highly transmissible omicron variant ignited a massive wave of illness.</p> <p>The seven-day average of hospital patients testing positive for coronavirus has declined to 39,000 as of Friday, after peaking at 47,000 around Jan. 10. Covid-19 patients are occupying 5 percent of hospital beds, compared with 21 percent at this point last year, according to CDC data.</p> |

Weekly emergency room visits for all three viruses combined peaked in early December — with no post-holiday resurgence, according to a [new CDC dashboard](#). For senior citizens, covid and flu emergency room visits peaked in late December.

“It’s possible the decline might have been even greater without the mingling in the holidays,” said Barbara Mahon, a CDC official who oversees the response to coronavirus and other respiratory viruses. “Things don’t look as bad as they did a few weeks or a few months ago, but we are still very much in the throes of winter.”

Experts caution the country could see additional increases in flu, which sometimes has two peaks, and another RSV season in spring. The highly transmissible and immune-evading XBB.1.5 subvariant of coronavirus that accounts for half of all new U.S. infections and has been dominant in the Northeast could spread elsewhere.

Despite the declines, it’s still a busy winter for hospitals contending with a new unpredictable rhythm of infectious diseases. The viral onslaughts have taken a toll on an exhausted health care workforce and compromised their ability to care for patients with non-respiratory emergencies, hospital executives say.

Headed into the third anniversary of coronavirus reaching the United States, many hospitals are resigned to it never going away.

“We have almost three full years of going nonstop, of surges, peaks, downward slopes, getting to a valley,” said Cathy Bennett, president and chief executive of the New Jersey Hospital Association. “It’s rinse, wash, repeat.”

Comparisons to the devastation of the first two pandemic winters can mask the ongoing toll on the elderly and severely immunocompromised. Covid deaths are rising and averaging about 670 a day, well short of the 3,300 a day peak in mid-January 2021.

The United States is better equipped now than earlier in the pandemic to weather coronavirus surges because most people have some degree of immunity, and [early treatment](#) keeps the most vulnerable people from becoming seriously ill.

“As awful as omicron was, it left in its wake a tremendous amount of immunity,” said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at Brown University School of Public Health.

Even though the omicron subvariants that are now circulating cause concern because of their ability to [evade antibodies](#), the immune systems of those who have been vaccinated or previously infected are still effective at keeping the cases mild, especially if they have [recently received booster shots](#), doctors say.

At the Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center in Baton Rouge, covid cases peaked the first week of January, with 170 patients testing positive compared with 1,338 the same time last year. Doctors there believe covid is still rampant in the community, but not as many people need hospital care.

Even after XBB.1.5 quickly became the dominant coronavirus strain in Massachusetts in December, the temporary rise in patients testing positive at the state’s largest hospital system was modest and did not surpass the last winter wave. The Mass General Brigham system, headquartered in Boston, now averages about 400 patients a day testing positive for coronavirus, compared to about 2,100 patients a day at this time last year.

Nearly three quarters of patients admitted with covid in the most recent peak were “secondary” diagnoses, meaning the patient tested positive while admitted for other causes. While such cases still create complications for hospitals to isolate the patient and prevent spread, they do not drain as many clinical resources, doctors say.

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| | <p>“This is all good news overall,” said Erica Shenoy, the system’s medical director of infection control. “One question we all have is, ‘Where is this going? Will we settle into a typical respiratory season where things will settle out?’”</p> <p>Flu is notoriously unpredictable in the public health field, but experts monitoring its trajectory say it appears to be in line with previous flu seasons and has started to decline early because it started early. The share of outpatient visits with respiratory illness has fallen below baseline levels in parts of the country, including the Upper Midwest, Great Plains and south central United States, the CDC said Friday.</p> <p>“Now the question is: Are we going to have a typical spring or a late season influenza B surge?” said Scott Hensley, a microbiologist who tracks flu viruses at the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine. He urges people who have not received flu shots to do so because Americans have less immunity, given the low numbers of influenza B cases in recent years.</p> <p>It’s important for public health experts and the media to be transparent but not alarmist in their messaging and reporting, said David Rubin, a pediatrician who tracks national respiratory virus trends as director of PolicyLab at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. The public fixation on a “tripledemic” was always something of a misnomer, he said, because viruses typically don’t surge simultaneously, but ebb and flow as they compete for hosts.</p> <p>“It can become like crying wolf,” he said, “and if there really is another public health emergency like a novel pandemic, will people listen?”</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Eritrea troops endanger Ethiopia peace deal |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/eritrean-troops-endanger-ethiopian-peace-deal-11674271835?mod=world_lead_pos5 |
| GIST | <p>A peace accord meant to end Ethiopia’s civil war is hitting a stumbling block, as troops from neighboring Eritrea who had been fighting on the side of the federal government have failed to withdraw, local and international officials say.</p> <p>Two-and-a-half months after rebel leaders from Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region and the federal government signed a cessation-of-hostilities agreement on Nov. 2, Eritrean soldiers still control more than a dozen towns across Tigray, where they have continued to kill and abduct civilians and block aid for millions of people, local and international officials say.</p> <p>Eritrean troops have killed at least 2,708 people and abducted 645 others between Nov. 2 and Dec. 30, according to an internal report by the Tigray Emergency Coordination Center, which includes United Nations agencies and Ethiopian government officials. The report also noted the alleged killings of 1,000 more people by fighters from the Ethiopian region of Amhara who also supported the federal government.</p> <p>The report, which has been viewed by The Wall Street Journal, says the deaths were verified by eyewitnesses interviewed by local civil-society groups. Aid workers interviewed by the Journal said abuses by Eritrean soldiers have continued this year.</p> <p>A spokeswoman for the U.N. Human Rights Council said its researchers are investigating alleged detentions and looting by Eritrean troops in the Ethiopian towns of Axum and Adwa in early November, and want to probe reports of more recent abuses. “For peace in Tigray to last, all parties to the conflict, including Eritrean forces, must put an immediate end to violations,” she said.</p> <p>Eritrea’s information minister, Yemane Meskel, said his country’s troops entered Tigray to stop what he said were plans by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, or TPLF, to expand its territory into Eritrea and denied that they were behind the killings of civilians and other abuses.</p> |

There have long been tensions between the two sides, fed in part by Eritrea's location to the northeast, cutting off Tigray from the strategic waterways of the Red Sea. The TPLF also led Ethiopia during a decadeslong war with Eritrea that only formally ended after Ethiopia's current prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, came to power in 2018.

Mr. Ahmed's government, which joined forces with Eritrea shortly after the war broke out in November 2020, has been silent on the alleged abuses by Eritrean troops. Redwan Hussein, Mr. Ahmed's national security adviser, told a Jan. 1 meeting of political leaders in Addis Ababa that Eritreans helped Ethiopia reverse the tide of war and shouldn't be asked to just leave, local media reported.

Mr. Hussein and a spokeswoman for Mr. Ahmed didn't respond to requests for comment.

Federal government officials and representatives of the TPLF have continued to implement the terms of the peace deal, including restoring power, telephone and banking services to large parts of the region after more than two years. Last week, TPLF fighters handed over heavy weapons, including tanks and rocket launchers, in a ceremony in the Tigrayan town of Agula.

But Getachew Reda, a member of the TPLF's executive committee and spokesman for the rebel group, said Eritrea's failure to withdraw from Tigray threatened the Nov. 2 accord. "Eritrean forces are digging in big time," Mr. Reda said. "They are standing in the way of peace."

Representatives from Eritrea's government and the Amhara militias weren't part of the November peace negotiations. The accord called for the withdrawal of foreign fighters, without naming Eritrea, and didn't say what would happen with areas of Tigray now occupied by militias from the Amhara region.

During a meeting with Mr. Ahmed on the sidelines of the U.S.-Africa summit in Washington in December, Secretary of State Antony Blinken called for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopia and access to the conflict areas for international human-rights monitors, according to a State Department spokesman.

Overall levels of violence in Tigray have declined since the signing of the peace accord, international officials and aid groups say.

An estimated 500,000 people were killed in the first two years of the conflict, while around 2 million were displaced. For months in 2021 and 2022, the Ethiopian government stopped humanitarian aid from reaching much of Tigray, where as many as 400,000 people were living in famine-like conditions, according to the U.N., and doctors said crucial medications such as insulin had become unavailable.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said this week that it had delivered food and other aid to some 3.7 million people between early October and Jan. 4, but that 1.7 million others remained out of reach.

Irob Anina Civil Society, a Canada-based group that has been sending undercover volunteer researchers to document abuses, said Eritrean forces controlling the border region are blocking the supply of humanitarian aid to some 40,000 people in the district of Irob.

"The communications blackout in some towns is still in effect," said Tesfaye Awala, head of the organization, who lives in Canada. "Our volunteers have to travel on foot for 16 hours to record testimonies from victims."

Some analysts have questioned how much sway Mr. Ahmed has over Eritrea's president, Isaias Afwerki, whose entry into the conflict helped Ethiopia turn the tide of war against the heavily armed and experienced TPLF fighters.

"Abiy wants to be in Washington's good graces but at the same time he made a deal with the devil to survive at home that undermines his global ambitions," said Cameron Hudson, a former U.S. State

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| | Department official now with the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. “How he keeps both Isaias and the West happy will be a tough needle to thread.” |
| Return to Top | |

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Russia claims advances Ukraine south |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-claims-advances-in-ukraines-south-as-allies-stall-on-tank-deliveries-11674392784?mod=world_lead_pos1 |
| GIST | <p>Moscow said its forces advanced in Ukraine’s southern Zaporizhzhia region as Kyiv’s Western allies continued pressuring Berlin to allow deliveries of German-made tanks to Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia’s Defense Ministry said Sunday that Russian troops had advanced in the partially occupied region and taken more advantageous lines and positions. The ministry’s spokesman, Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, didn’t provide further details.</p> <p>It was the second time in two days that Moscow has said its forces were advancing in the south of Ukraine.</p> <p>President Vladimir Putin claimed the region as part of Russia’s territory in September despite continued fighting, and its defense is a priority for the Kremlin.</p> <p>As in the eastern Donetsk region, which Mr. Putin has also claimed and where Moscow says it has taken several towns in recent weeks, Ukrainian officials said there was fighting in the Zaporizhzhia region but didn’t say any territory had been lost.</p> <p>The claimed advances come as Russia has shown signs of turning the tide in the war after a string of losses in the early fall. Mr. Putin’s mobilization drive of 300,000 reservists along with the recruitment of inmates from across Russia’s vast prison system into the Wagner paramilitary group, whose forces now total about 50,000 in Ukraine, have shifted the war of attrition in Moscow’s favor.</p> <p>The Russian claims add urgency to Ukraine’s pleas for more heavy weaponry from the West, particularly modern battle tanks.</p> <p>German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has, so far, resisted growing pressure to allow the country’s Leopard 2 tanks—among the most common in Europe—to be transferred to Ukraine. German officials initially said they wouldn’t approve sending Leopards unless the U.S. provided its own Abrams tanks, which the U.S. has so far declined to do, saying they are too difficult to maintain. Germany’s new defense minister, Boris Pistorius, has told German television that German and U.S. tanks don’t need to be provided at the same time and indicated that his government was still considering what to do.</p> <p>Mr. Scholz was in France on Sunday, where he met with French President Emmanuel Macron to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Élysée Treaty between the two countries, which provided the foundation for a new era of cooperation in Europe. Speaking at Sorbonne University in Paris, Mr. Scholz said that Germany would back Ukraine for as long as necessary, according to local media. Later in the day, ministers from the two countries were scheduled to hold a joint cabinet meeting, with aid for Ukraine among the agenda items.</p> <p>Over the past week, more North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies have openly called for Germany to send the tanks.</p> <p>The British government has already announced plans to send its Challenger 2 tanks to Kyiv. On Sunday morning, James Cleverly, the British foreign secretary, said that Ukrainian officials had been telling him that tanks were what they needed to push back Russians in the country’s occupied eastern and southern regions.</p> <p>“I have been talking with my international counterparts about the provision of military equipment, particularly the Leopard 2 tank, which is an incredibly effective piece of equipment,” Mr. Cleverly said,</p> |

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| | speaking on Sky News. “I will keep having those conversations with our NATO allies and friends to facilitate the donation of the best military equipment to Ukraine.” |
| Return to Top | |

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| HEADLINE | 01/21 Atlanta protesters violent in ‘night of rage’ |
| SOURCE | https://nypost.com/2023/01/21/protesters-torch-police-car-damage-businesses-in-atlanta-after-activist-killed/ |
| GIST | <p>An angry crowd took to the streets of Atlanta Saturday night, smashing windows and torching a police car in response to the death of a 26-year-old protester Wednesday, reports said.</p> <p>Atlanta Police Chief Darin Schierbaum told reporters that multiple protesters were found with explosive devices on them. One of the devices was used to set an Atlanta Police car on fire.</p> <p>Protesters — who hit the streets after calls for a “Night of Rage” by Antifa members — were also seen throwing bricks at Atlanta Police Department vehicles smashing property, 11Alive reported.</p> <p>At least six people were arrested and three businesses were damaged, police said.</p> <p>Just before 7 p.m., police said “order has been restored to the downtown space.”</p> <p>Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp condemned the protesters’ actions Saturday night. “Violence and unlawful destruction of property are not acts of protest,” he tweeted. “They are crimes that will not be tolerated in Georgia and will be prosecuted fully.”</p> <p>Schierbaum said the protests began peacefully marching in the city around 5 p.m. when some members began smashing property. The ATF and FBI are assisting with the investigation.</p> <p>“We already know that we have arrested actors that have already been involved in other criminal activity and are involved in a manner to deter the building of the public safety training center,” he told reporters.</p> <p>The mayhem comes after Manuel Esteban Paez Teran was shot and killed by Georgia State Patrol troopers who were trying to clear protesters camping near the site of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center — dubbed “Cop City.” Paez had allegedly shot and wounded an officer, officials said.</p> <p>The chaos comes after a group called Scenes from the Atlanta Forest put up a social media post Wednesday calling for “retaliation.” ““On Friday, January 20th, wherever you are, you are invited to participate in a night of rage in order to honor the memory of our fallen comrade,” the message continued.</p> <p>Opponents of the training center have been protesting for over a year by building platforms in surrounding trees and camping out at the site.</p> <p>They claim that the \$90 million project, which would be built by the Atlanta Police Foundation, involves cutting down so many trees that it would be environmentally damaging.</p> <p>Activists have questioned the police version of events in Teran’s death and have called for the release of law enforcement body camera footage. GBI said Friday that there is no bodycam footage of the shooting.</p> <p>Spokespeople with “Stop Cop City,” who have claimed several times that they are peaceful protesters, defended their actions as nonviolent in a statement provided to WSB-TV.</p> <p>“Destruction of material is fundamentally different from violence. All reported acts appear to be explicitly targeted against the financial backers & goons of the Atlanta Police Foundation, a shady nonprofit that funnels weapons and military gear into our city to wage war on black and brown folks,” the organization said.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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| HEADLINE | 01/21 Unemployed find job searches take longer |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/unemployed-americans-find-job-searches-take-longer-as-labor-market-cools-11674248887?mod=hp_major_pos2#cxrecs_s |
| GIST | <p>When Jeffrey Durante was laid off from a financial technology company in August, he hoped he could land a new job by November.</p> <p>But come mid-January, Mr. Durante was still searching for a product-manager job or related role. And he isn't alone.</p> <p>Unemployed Americans across the U.S. are spending more time out of work as employers slow down hiring from a red-hot pace earlier in the pandemic. In December, 826,000 unemployed workers had been out of a job for about 3½ to 6 months, up from 526,000 in April 2022, according to the Labor Department. Earlier this month, the number of people seeking ongoing unemployment benefits, known as continuing claims, was 26% above half-century lows reached last spring.</p> <p>Mr. Durante has broadened his search from tech companies to include firms across several industries. The 28-year-old, who resides in the Washington, D.C., area, said he interviewed with five companies that told him they were putting the positions on hold amid budget cuts and hiring freezes. He was encouraged that companies could see his value, but the news hurt.</p> <p>"It just is a gut punch honestly after getting told that you're good enough for the job but they can't hire you," Mr. Durante said. "Especially in this economy and this job market right now, it's just something that takes the air from underneath your wings."</p> <p>Companies started dialing back on hiring last year, in part reflecting heightened uncertainty in the face of Federal Reserve interest-rate increases. The pullback in hiring helps explain why some job seekers are remaining unemployed for longer despite a strong overall labor market with historically high job openings.</p> <p>"If you're somebody who has lost a job, your opportunities of finding one quickly have diminished somewhat since the spring," said Guy Berger, principal economist at professional networking site LinkedIn.</p> <p>When employers turn cautious about the economic outlook, they are more likely to first pull back on hiring than they are to resort to layoffs because it is less costly to resume hiring, Mr. Berger said. Such a dynamic occurred during previous slowdowns, he said. Companies hired 8% fewer workers from December 2007 to May 2008 as the recession began, while layoffs ticked up at a slower pace of 2%, Labor Department data show.</p> <p>It is unclear whether the pool of unemployed workers will expand in the coming months. The unemployment rate was at a half-century low of 3.5% in December. Firms in lower-wage sectors such as restaurants, bars and hotels might be reluctant to cut workers they struggled to hire during the pandemic rebound.</p> <p>But demand for labor is weakening fastest in white-collar industries. Large companies including Microsoft Corp., Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Google parent Alphabet Inc. have announced cuts. Layoffs in finance, real estate and tech are beginning to rise from historically low levels as companies that bulked up their staffs earlier in the pandemic shed employees.</p> <p>Workers who lose their jobs have fewer job prospects than they did a year ago. Postings on job-search site Indeed.com in software development were down 38.5% on Jan. 6 from a year earlier, while they were 30.8% lower in media and 25.6% lower in banking and finance. Overall postings were down 9.9%.</p> <p>Sarah Herhilan, 44, has submitted close to 2,000 applications since her contractor job in human resources ended over the summer. She is casting a wide net, applying for human-resources jobs and others including a customer-service position at a Home Depot store and an assembly role at a small manufacturing plant.</p> |

The Port Sanilac, Mich., resident is finding that the competition is much stiffer than in the latter half of 2021, when she was also unemployed and looking for work. For a remote position in human resources, she has recently seen 800 other applicants for the same job on LinkedIn, roughly three to four times as many applicants as she had to compete with in 2021. She is landing far fewer interview opportunities.

Ms. Herhilaran exhausted Michigan's allotted 20 weeks of unemployment benefits. Now, she is running through savings.

"I'm very, very frustrated and extremely stressed and anxious because I don't know when I'm going to land a job," she said, noting she has had some wonderful, in-depth conversations with employers.

"I get off the phone feeling really, really good or get out of the interview feeling really, really good. And then I either get ghosted or they tell me that they've chosen another candidate," Ms. Herhilaran said.

Ads on Indeed.com for human-resources jobs have dropped sharply over the past year.

"That suggests that overall hiring will be pulling back as well," said Nick Bunker, economist at Indeed. "You only stop hiring the people who help you hire when you have no plans to further expand."

Payrolls grew an average of 375,000 a month in 2022, down from an average of 562,000 in 2021, when the economy was rebounding from the pandemic. The coming months will reveal whether the slowdown in hiring is temporary or the start of a deeper downturn.

Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal in January said they expect employers to cut jobs starting in the second quarter through the end of the year. For 2023 as a whole, economists expect that payrolls will decline by 7,000 a month on average.

There is a silver lining for unemployed Americans: Job openings remain historically high. That means many workers such as Daniel Wilkerson are still finding jobs, even though it is taking longer than they anticipated.

Mr. Wilkerson of Spanish Fork, Utah, said he would start a new role in sales and recruiting at a staffing agency in late January after months of unemployment. Mr. Wilkerson was laid off from an account-executive role at a software company in September. He expected to quickly find a new job, given an abundance of job openings and his history of finding work fast.

But his unemployment spell started to draw out. Without a steady source of income, the 37-year-old had to put his house in forbearance. He collected weekly unemployment benefits of \$650 and food stamps to help financially support himself and his four children.

Since Mr. Wilkerson submitted over 200 job applications and interviewed with about 10 companies, his longest job search ever is now over. In his new position at the recruitment company, he is looking forward to helping connect workers with jobs when they need them.

"Now I get the opportunity to help others, and I can empathize with them," he said. "I'm so excited."

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 China global mega-projects falling apart |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-global-mega-projects-infrastructure-falling-apart-11674166180?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos5 |
| GIST | SAN LUIS, Ecuador—Built near a spewing volcano, it was the biggest infrastructure project ever in this country, a concrete colossus bankrolled by Chinese cash and so important to Beijing that China's leader, Xi Jinping, spoke at the 2016 inauguration. |

Today, thousands of cracks have emerged in the \$2.7 billion Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric plant, government engineers said, raising concerns that Ecuador's biggest source of power could break down. At the same time, the Coca River's mountainous slopes are eroding, threatening to damage the dam.

"We could lose everything," said Fabricio Yépez, an engineer at the University of San Francisco in Quito who has closely tracked the project's problems. "And we don't know if it could be tomorrow or in six months."

It is one of many Chinese-financed projects around the world plagued with construction flaws.

During the past decade, China handed out a [trillion dollars in international loans as part of Beijing's Belt and Road](#) initiative, intended to develop economic trade and expand China's influence across Asia, Africa and Latin America. Those loans made Beijing the largest government lender to the developing world by far, with its loans totaling nearly as much as those of all other governments combined, according to the World Bank.

Yet China's [lending practices have been criticized](#) by foreign leaders, economists and others, who say the program has contributed to [debt crises in places like Sri Lanka](#) and [Zambia](#), and that many countries have limited ways to repay the loans. Some projects have also been called mismatches for a country's infrastructure needs or damaging to the environment.

Now, low-quality construction on some of the projects risks crippling key infrastructure and saddling nations with even more costs for years to come as they try to remedy problems.

"We are suffering today because of the bad quality of equipment and parts" in Chinese-built projects, said René Ortiz, Ecuador's former energy minister and ex-secretary general of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

China's Embassy in Ecuador didn't respond to requests for comment on the hydroelectric project. In a recent letter published on the embassy's Twitter account in response to a report by the Foundation for Citizenship and Development, the local chapter of anticorruption watchdog Transparency International, on China's lending practices in Ecuador, the embassy said Chinese loans and projects provided "tangible benefits" to Ecuador at a time when the country was in urgent need of financing.

[Chinese money has been used](#) to build everything from a port in Pakistan to roads in Ethiopia and a transmission line in Brazil.

Chinese construction companies often bid for government projects or directly approach local officials with projects with a promise that they can easily arrange financing packages from Chinese banks and insurers.

That, developing-country officials say, has given Chinese companies a leg up, because it means governments eager to build a new dam or road don't have to drum up their own funding. In Africa, more than 60% of the revenue major international contractors collected in 2019 went to Chinese companies, according to a 2021 paper by the China-Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University.

Critics say the relatively easy availability of Chinese loans for Chinese construction can lead to inflated project costs because there is less pressure on governments to minimize expenses.

Construction defects

Flaws in some of the Chinese-built projects have come to light.

In Pakistan, officials shut down the Neelum-Jhelum hydroelectric plant last year after detecting cracks in a tunnel that transports water through a mountain to drive a turbine.

The head of the country's electricity regulator, Tauseef Farooqui, told Pakistan's senate in November that he was concerned the tunnel could collapse just four years after the 969-megawatt plant became

operational. That would be disastrous for a nation that has been battered by rising energy prices, said Mr. Farooqui. The closure of the plant has already cost Pakistan about \$44 million a month in higher power costs since July, according to the regulator.

Hydropower plants can have operating lives of up to 100 years, according to the World Bank.

Uganda's power generation company said it has identified more than 500 construction defects in a Chinese-built 183-megawatt hydropower plant on the Nile river that has suffered frequent breakdowns since it went into operation in 2019. China International Water & Electric Corp., which led construction of the Isimba Hydro Power Plant, failed to build a floating boom to protect the dam from water weeds and other debris, which has led to clogged turbines and power outages, according to the Uganda Electricity Generation Co., or UEGC. There have also been leaks in the roof of the plant's power house, where the generators and turbines are located, UEGC said. The plant cost \$567.7 million to build and was financed mostly through a \$480 million loan from the Export-Import Bank of China.

Completion of another Chinese-built hydropower plant further down the Nile, the 600-megawatt Karuma Hydro Power Project, is three years behind schedule, a delay that Ugandan officials have blamed on various construction defects, including cracked walls. UEGC also said the Chinese contractor, Sinohydro Corp., installed faulty cables, switches and a fire extinguishing system that need to be replaced. Earlier this year, the government had to start paying back the \$1.44 billion it borrowed from the Export-Import Bank of China to finance the project, even as the plant remains inoperational.

Sinohydro and China International Water didn't respond to requests for comment on the Ugandan projects.

In Angola, 10 years after the first tenants moved into Kilamba Kiaxi, a vast social housing project outside the capital of Luanda, many locals are complaining about cracked walls, moldy ceilings and poor construction.

The project, built by China's CITIC Group, was initially funded through a \$2.5 billion, oil-backed credit line from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China that was later refinanced by the China Development Bank, according to William & Mary's Aid Data Research Lab.

"Our building has a lot of cracks," said Aida Francisco, who lives in a four-bedroom apartment in Kilamba with her husband and three sons. Like many other middle-class families in Kilamba, she is purchasing the apartment through a rent-to-buy program. Humidity collects in the apartment's walls, causing mold, Ms. Francisco said, and a lot of the building materials, including doors and railings, are of poor quality.

When she first moved to Kilamba in 2016, Ms. Francisco said, Chinese contractors still came to fix problems. But in recent years many buildings, including hers, have fallen into disrepair, especially as many tenants, who are responsible for the upkeep, lost their jobs amid Angola's economic crisis.

"If you see these buildings, they won't last long," said Ms. Francisco. "They're falling apart bit by bit."

A spokeswoman for CITIC said humidity issues in a small number of units in Kilamba were due to tenants making improper renovations and that the company had completed required maintenance.

The Chinese government didn't respond to requests for comment on criticism of Chinese-built infrastructure in Africa and Asia. A spokesman for Angola's ministry for Construction and Public Works didn't respond to requests for comment.

Many Chinese projects fulfill real development needs, especially in countries that struggle to get other financing to build necessary infrastructure. In Argentina's poor, northern province of Jujuy, PowerChina built the Cauchari solar park, South America's biggest solar project. At more than 13,000 feet above sea level, it is able to power some 160,000 homes, according to Argentina's government. In Brazil, China's State Grid built one of the world's longest transmission lines, connecting the Belo Monte dam in the northeast to southern cities some 1,550 miles away.

Surge in Ecuador spending

In Latin America, Ecuador was at the forefront of Beijing's push into the region, with Quito accessing more in loans than any country except two much bigger nations, Venezuela and Brazil, according to the Inter-American Dialogue, a think tank.

After a 2008 sovereign-debt default, then-president Rafael Correa, a leftist who during his tenure from 2007 to 2017 often clashed with the U.S. and railed against multilateral lenders, turned to China to finance a surge in public spending. In total, Chinese banks lent Ecuador \$18 billion during Mr. Correa's term.

Ecuadorean lawmakers, former government ministers and anticorruption activists say the loans lacked transparency, with contracts given to companies without public bids, resulting in shoddy construction, high costs and graft.

In the recent letter published on the Chinese Embassy in Ecuador's Twitter account, it said the financing was agreed on during friendly negotiations with Ecuador and fully complies with laws and regulations in both countries.

Current government officials and Ecuadorean economists said some projects made little sense, including the expropriation of thousands of acres of farmland in an Andean valley to build a new metropolis called Yachay City that was supposed to turn Ecuador into a regional tech power. The Export-Import Bank of China provided a \$200 million loan for early infrastructure works. Today, the project has been abandoned, with a \$6.3 million supercomputer that was supposed to be used by researchers sitting out of doors and unused.

In 2019, the comptroller general's office reviewed the construction of 200 Chinese-built schools, reporting that some of the buildings had problems with their foundations and others had classrooms with sloping floors and exposed cables. Fifty-seven of the schools were finished behind schedule, the comptroller general's office said.

"Correa spent on many projects that were not adequate," said Vicente Albornoz, an economist at the University of Las Americas in Quito. "And China was funding Correa's spending [on the projects]."

Mr. Correa said in an interview the money boosted Ecuador's development with new highways, hospitals and schools. Four Chinese-built hydroelectric projects provided clean power and reduced reliance on imported fossil fuels. The Chinese projects also improved a once unreliable power grid that led to regular blackouts in Quito. Today, 90% of Ecuador's electricity comes from hydro, compared with 55% in 2007, according to the state utility.

"China's relationship with Ecuador was an example in Latin America," said Mr. Correa. "We did things that changed the history of the country."

The former president, who was convicted in 2020 of corruption charges in a case involving payments to his party in exchange for public contracts, is in exile in Belgium. He denies wrongdoing.

China's most ambitious project in Ecuador was Coca Codo Sinclair, which Ecuadorean engineers first studied for the Coca River in the 1970s. Back then, they considered it a risky venture due to its steep cost and location near an active volcano.

But Ecuador wanted the dam to improve an electrical grid that regularly suffered blackouts and relied on costly energy imports. Today, it supplies about a third of Ecuador's electricity.

During Mr. Correa's term, the China Development Bank agreed to finance 85% of Coca Codo Sinclair's initial cost, with a 6.9% interest rate. Sinohydro did the construction and flew in hundreds of Chinese workers to build the power plant between 2010 and 2016.

The China Development Bank and Sinohydro didn't respond to requests for comment.

In September, prosecutors searched the office of Sinohydro over allegations it paid bribes to people close to Mr. Correa's vice president, Lenin Moreno, when the contract was awarded to the Chinese firm. No one has been charged in that ongoing investigation. Mr. Moreno, who later served as president from 2017 to 2021, has publicly denied wrongdoing.

Larger capacity

Some engineers questioned the project early on, saying that the environmental studies were out of date. The plant's 1,500-megawatt capacity was much larger than the originally envisioned capacity of about 1,000 megawatts, adding to costs and creating more capacity than the river could power, according to former energy officials and congressional investigators. In 2014, 13 Chinese and Ecuadorean employees were crushed to death in a construction accident.

Since the 2016 opening, officials from the state electricity utility have found more than 17,000 cracks in the power plant's eight turbines, according to the state utility. It blames the fissures on faulty steel imported from China. In 2021, the utility took Sinohydro to international arbitration in Chile, which is ongoing, over demands to repair the damage.

"No crack is acceptable," the utility said in response to questions from The Wall Street Journal. "They could result in the equipment losing its structural integrity, causing it to collapse."

President Guillermo Lasso's government has refused to officially take over management of the plant from Sinohydro, as was planned at the completion of construction, until the cracks are repaired. Numerous attempts to fix the cracks have failed, utility officials said.

"Over my dead body will I accept this poorly built plant," Energy Minister Fernando Santos told local media in November.

In San Luis, locals like Adriana Carranza got jobs with Sinohydro, which hired her to cook for Chinese workers. The 14-hour days were long, and her Chinese boss didn't speak Spanish. But the job allowed her to save enough to build a house for her family, she said. At home, she still cooks sweet-and-sour chicken and other Chinese dishes.

But in 2020, the Coca River's slopes began collapsing, creating thunderous crashes and rattling the ground like an earthquake. The erosion destroyed Ecuador's biggest waterfall. It took out a stretch of a key road and oil pipeline. The Pink House, a brothel in San Luis that locals say was popular with both Chinese and Ecuadorean workers, tumbled into the river. Ms. Carranza said a neighbor's home went over the cliff.

Fearing for her family's safety in her own home, Ms. Carranza fled San Luis in March, salvaging anything she could from her house, taking windows, doors and even the roof. "I became deeply depressed, I couldn't get out of bed," Ms. Carranza said. "We've lost everything."

Ecuador's state utility said the erosion is a natural phenomenon in an area prone to natural disasters. Some geologists agree, but others blamed Coca Codo Sinclair, saying that its concrete structures so disrupted the river's natural flow and accumulation of sediments that the fast-moving water began to cut into the river banks as it descends from the Andes on its way to the Amazon rainforest.

"The erosion is a process that would normally occur over thousands or millions of years, but the dam has accelerated it in a matter of just five years," said Carolina Bernal, a geologist at the National Polytechnic School, a public university in Quito.

Ecuador has unsuccessfully tried to stop the erosion as the river nears Coca Codo Sinclair, including by placing shipping containers in the water to slow the current. They were quickly washed away.

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| | <p>Ms. Bernal said the government will likely need to relocate a key part of the plant—the project’s water intake—which would cost millions of dollars, before that structure is destroyed by the erosion.</p> <p>Nancy Chicaiza, a San Luis resident, has little hope for the survival of her town, which once bustled with Chinese workers who bought drinks and snacks at her bodega. She now expects the erosion will eventually wipe out all of San Luis.</p> <p>“Coca Codo was initially seen as really good,” said Ms. Chicaiza. “Nobody thought we’d be facing these consequences.”</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
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| HEADLINE | 01/21 Ukraine winter turn against Russia troops? |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-winter-could-turn-against-russian-troops-11674294354?cx_testId=3&cx_testVariant=cx_166&cx_artPos=1&mod=WTRN#cxrecs_s |
| GIST | <p>BAKHMUT, Ukraine—In the battle to keep warm, Ukrainian infantryman Kyrylo Molchanov has turned to “trench candles”—empty food cans packed with cardboard—to heat his front-line dugout.</p> <p>With Russia and Ukraine fighting through the winter, keeping Ukrainian soldiers warm could become a competitive advantage for Kyiv.</p> <p>For armies, winter weather affects everything from maneuverability to battery power. But the cold and wet can have a crushing effect on soldiers’ morale and ability to fight, while creating potential medical problems.</p> <p>The U.S. and its allies have sent hundreds of thousands of pieces of winter clothing. Ukraine has supplemented those supplies from elsewhere, and the various items in Lt. Molchanov’s uniform come from several countries.</p> <p>Some Russian soldiers seem to be arriving for battle less well kitted out, hindered in part by a hasty mobilization drive in the fall.</p> <p>Ukraine’s armed forces are adapting, cutting wood from local forests, sourcing smaller barracks and using the trench candles, which volunteers and family send packed tight with rolls of cardboard.</p> <p>“If you light it an hour or two before going to bed, it heats up more than you would expect,” Lt. Molchanov said from Ukraine’s southern front line.</p> <p>Ukraine’s winter has so far been mild, but temperatures can frequently drop to below minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit.</p> <p>Mild or not, winter affects fighting in many ways. As leaves fall, it is harder to conceal equipment. Fog, rain and snow make identifying targets more difficult. Cold degrades battery life faster, affecting drones and radios. Mud makes movement problematic, but when the ground freezes, digging trenches and minefields is harder. Soldiers burn more calories in the cold, so need more food.</p> <p>But one of the biggest problems is that wet and cold weather can affect morale and performance.</p> <p>“When you are really, really cold, you stop thinking about anything except how cold you are,” said Ben Hodges, a former commanding general of the U.S. Army in Europe, who says Western-supplied clothing and better leadership to help troops keep warm gives Ukraine the advantage.</p> <p>Having the right uniforms, sleeping bags and clothing such as socks is essential to any winter fight, said Ed Arnold, from the Royal United Services Institute, a London defense-and-security think tank.</p> |

The former British infantry officer witnessed the negative effects of cold weather on his troops in winter training.

“Soldiers can degrade in a couple of days if they are not in the right mind-set and haven’t got the right kit,” he said.

In the muddy, scrappy conditions of the front line, uniforms don’t last long, said Nico Woods, a former U.S. Navy officer who is now a manager at the Ukrainian Freedom Fund, a charity that has been supplying winter gear to Ukraine.

To this end, charity groups and allied Western militaries have sent containers full of winter clothing to Ukraine. Canada sent up to 500,000 pieces, including jackets, pants, boots, gloves and parkas. The U.S. has said it would send 50,000 parkas, 4,700 pairs of pants, more than 23,000 pairs of boots and 18,000 gloves, among other items. When Ukrainian soldiers train in Britain, they return home with full winter clothing. Other allies have contributed supplies.

At a military base in eastern Ukraine, boxes of boots, thick padded jackets, snow camouflage, fleeces and thermal underwear from around the world are piled high up the walls of several rooms.

Ukraine’s cosmopolitan wardrobe shows on its soldiers. Outside Bakhmut, a Ukrainian army captain pointed out his U.S. Army T-shirt, pants from the Marine Corps and a Polish jacket.

Russian troops, particularly new recruits, appear to be less well equipped to deal with cold weather. Russian social media feature videos showing new recruits complaining about their lack of suitable kit while media reports chart soldiers stocking up on cold-weather gear. Russia’s Ministry of Defense declined to comment.

Ukrainians also sometimes have to supplement their gear, said a front-line infantryman who has used Japanese chemical patches that warmed his legs for eight hours. Not all foreign uniforms are especially warm, and front-line troops sometimes buy extra boots because their standard-issue footwear doesn’t keep them warm enough, he said.

Keeping warm on the front line is more difficult because heat makes it easier to target positions through thermal sensors and smoke from wood fires gives away locations. That is why many soldiers are turning to the more targeted warmth of a trench candle.

The supply of electricity, which Russia has targeted across Ukraine, can be particularly patchy on the front.

When securing barracks, troops look for small buildings with wood-burning stoves, said an artillery commander from 46th Brigade outside of Soledar. His barracks have no electricity or gas supply.

On a recent visit, a small stove, or burzhuyka, warmed the three-room barracks, a crumbling house. At night, people have to wake up to refuel it, the commander said. Outside, a group of artillery men stood around a small wood fire, a pile of wood and ax beside them.

Wood is an essential fuel in this war. Throughout parts of eastern Ukraine, soldiers can be seen cutting logs in local woods. Roadside guard posts have wood-burning heaters, with piles of logs stored outside.

Troops’ ability to deal with cold weather has proven pivotal in past conflicts, such as when Nazi Germany invaded Ukraine and the rest of the Soviet Union.

There, German soldiers envied the Red Army’s padded cotton jackets, which were warmer than their own “greatcoats” made from recycled wool, said Antony Beevor, a historian who has written about the battle of Stalingrad. Germans had a higher rate of frostbite, he said.

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| | <p>Frostbite, trench foot and pneumonia are among the conditions that take soldiers out of action in the winter. Even minor injuries and illness have grave consequences in cold and muddy trenches, doctors say.</p> <p>Fedir Aleksevich, a medic of the Skala battalion that defends Bakhmut, said that severe frostbite was a serious problem for his unit earlier this month. Dr. Aleksevich said these cases, luckily, weren't grave enough to end up with amputations, which has happened in some other units.</p> <p>Dr. Aleksevich says soldiers need warm and dry socks to avoid frostbite, not tightfitting footwear, which stops proper blood circulation.</p> <p>There are other problems.</p> <p>Andriy Zholob, the commander of the 46th Brigade's medical unit, described what he called an epidemic of flu.</p> <p>"Winter is flu, flu is winter," he said.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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| HEADLINE | 01/21 Activist killed protesting Georgia 'cop city' |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/21/protester-killed-georgia-cop-city-police-shooting |
| GIST | <p>Belkis Terán spoke with her child, Manuel, nearly every day by WhatsApp from her home in Panama City, Panama. She also had names and numbers for some of Manuel's friends, in case she didn't hear from the 26-year-old who was protesting "Cop City", a planned gigantic training facility being built in a wooded area near Atlanta, Georgia.</p> <p>So by midweek, when she hadn't received a message from Atlanta since Monday, she began to worry. Thursday around noon, a friend of Manuel's – whose chosen name was "Tortuguita," or "Little Turtle" – messaged her with condolences. "I'm so sorry," they wrote. "For what?" she asked.</p> <p>Terán wound up discovering that on Wednesday around 9.04am, an as-yet unnamed officer or officers had shot and killed her son. The shooting occurred in an operation involving dozens of officers from Atlanta police, Dekalb county police, Georgia state patrol, the Georgia bureau of investigation and the FBI.</p> <p>The killing has stunned and shocked not only Tortuguita's family and friends, but also the environmental and social justice movement in Georgia and across the United States. Circumstances surrounding the incident are still unclear and there are demands for a thorough investigation into the killing and how it could have happened.</p> <p>The police apparently found Manuel in a tent in the South River forest south-east of Atlanta, taking part in a protest now in its second year, against plans to build a \$90m police and fire department training facility on the land and, separately, a film studio.</p> <p>Officials say Manuel shot first at a state trooper "without warning" and an officer or officers returned fire, but they have produced no evidence for the claim. The trooper was described as stable and in hospital Thursday.</p> <p>The shooting is "unprecedented" in the history of US environmental activism, according to experts.</p> <p>The GBI, which operates under Republican governor Brian Kemp's orders, has released scant information and on Thursday night told the Guardian no body-cam footage of the shooting exists. At least a half-dozen other protesters who were in the forest at the time have communicated to other activists that one, single series of shots could be heard. They believe the state trooper could have been shot by another officer, or by his own firearm.</p> |

Meanwhile, both Terán and local activists are looking into legal action, and Manuel's mother told the Guardian: "I will go to the US to defend Manuel's memory ... I'm convinced that he was assassinated in cold blood."

The incident was the latest in a ramping-up of law enforcement raids on the forest in recent months.

Protests had begun in late 2021, after the then Atlanta mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, announced plans for the training center. The forest had been named in city plans four years earlier as a key part of efforts to maintain Atlanta's renowned tree canopy as a buffer against global warming, and to create what would have been the metro area's largest park.

Most of the residents in neighborhoods around the forest are Black and municipal planning has neglected the area for decades. The plans to preserve the forest and make it a historic public amenity were adopted in 2017 as part of Atlanta's city charter, or constitution. But the Atlanta city council wound up approving the training center anyway, and a movement to "Stop Cop City" began in response.

A series of editorials and news stories lambasting the activists began in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the area's largest daily paper. At least a dozen articles in the last year-plus failed to mention that Alex Taylor, CEO of the paper's owner, Cox Enterprises, was also raising funds on behalf of the Atlanta police foundation, the main agency behind the training center.

At some point, Kemp and other civic leaders began referring to the protesters as "terrorists", in response to acts of vandalism such as burning construction vehicles or spray-painting corporate offices linked to the project.

In an interview with this reporter last fall, Tortugueta was discussing how some Muscogee (Creek) people interested in protecting the forest as well felt that leaving a burnt vehicle at one of its entrances was not a good idea, and was an alienating presence in nature. The activist seemed understanding of both sides and critical of violence.

"Some of us [forest defenders] are rowdy gringos," Tortugueta said. "They're just against the state. Still, I don't know how you can connect to anything if that's your entire political analysis."

Police raids on the forest intensified until 14 December, when a half-dozen "forest defenders" were arrested and charged with "domestic terrorism" under state law – another unprecedented development in US environmental activism, said Lauren Regan, founder of the Civil Liberties Defense Center, who has a quarter-century's experience defending environmental protestors charged with federal terrorism sentencing enhancements and others.

Seven more activists were arrested and received the same charges the day Manuel was killed.

Regan and Keith Woodhouse, professor of history at Northwestern University and author of *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism*, both said there has never been a case where law enforcement has shot and killed an environmental activist engaged in an attempt to protect a forest from being razed and developed.

"Killings of environmental activists by the state are depressingly common in other countries, like Brazil, Honduras, Nigeria," said Woodhouse. "But this has never happened in the US."

Manuel's older brother, Daniel Esteban Paez, found himself in the middle of this unfortunate historical moment Thursday. "They killed my sibling," he said on answering the phone. "I'm in a whole new world now."

Paez, 31, was the only family member to speak extensively with GBI officials, after calling them Thursday in an attempt to get answers about what had happened. No one representing Georgia law enforcement had

reached out to Belkis by Thursday afternoon. “I quickly found out, they’re not investigating the death of Manuel – they’re investigating Manuel,” Paez said.

A navy veteran, Paez said the GBI official asked him such questions as “Does Manuel often carry weapons?” and “Has Manuel done protesting in the past?”

The family is Venezuelan in origin, but now lives in the US and Panama, Paez said. Less than 24 hours into discovering the death of his sibling, Paez also said he “had no idea Manuel was so well-regarded and loved by so many”. He was referring to events and messages ranging from an Atlanta candlelight vigil Wednesday night to messages of solidarity being sent on social media from across the US and world.

Belkis Terán, meanwhile, is trying to get an emergency appointment at the US Embassy in Panama to renew her tourist visa, which expired in November. “I’m going to clear Manuel’s name. They killed him ... like they tear down trees in the forest – a forest Manuel loved with passion.”

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/21 Storm-bruised California begins recovery |
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| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/21/california-begins-recovery-after-storm-joe-biden-visit |
| GIST | <p>Mud oozed and swirled under the wheels of Darren Sauter’s tractor. The slick remnants of the state’s epic, weeks-long rainstorms left neighborhoods like this one in Felton, California, inundated even after the waters receded. Days after the downpours, Sauter and others were working to rid homes and streets of the dirty muck, piled 3ft high in places.</p> <p>“People have had to just live with this,” said Sauter, speaking over the hum of his equipment as he worked on Wednesday afternoon. Sauter came down from Ben Lomond, a town just north of this quiet neighborhood in the Santa Cruz mountains, to help volunteer with the daunting cleanup. Riding a bright orange front loader, he shoveled mud to the side to create a pathway through the wet earth, still laden with chemical contaminants from the roadway and the smell of sewage, as solemn-faced residents looked on. “You can’t even walk through it.”</p> <p>Spanning redwood covered mountains to the beaches of the Pacific coast, Santa Cruz county is a region of vast geographical and socioeconomic diversity. It has also borne the brunt of the brutal California rainstorms, which dropped an estimated 32.6tn gallons of water in just three weeks, causing an estimated \$1bn in damage statewide and claiming at least 21 lives.</p> <p>From hillside towns like Felton to the picturesque coastal enclave of Capitola, the long road to recovery from disaster is only beginning. The county was declared a major disaster zone by Joe Biden, who visited Capitola on Thursday to survey the damage and said it would “take years to rebuild”.</p> <p>At least a thousand homes in Santa Cruz county were damaged during the deluge, according to officials, but assessments are still ongoing. Estimates of the destruction on private land are expected to be in the tens of millions with public infrastructure damage believed to be in excess of \$55m. The financial toll is only expected to grow.</p> <p>“We are definitely transitioning from the response phase of this disaster to the recovery phase,” said Dave Reid, director of the Santa Cruz county office of response, recovery and resilience. “For some people that might look like reestablishing access to their homes and for others it might mean having to completely rebuild.”</p> <p>Even as the sun pierced through gray haze this week, offering a hopeful reprieve from the relentless rain, risks remain. New dangers lurk in soggy buildings as threats from mold and other environmental health hazards can quickly take hold. Saturated hillsides could still crumble without warning. Though the downpours have ended – at least for now – there’s no time to lose.</p> |

“We are only at the beginning of our peak rainy season,” Reid said. But there are also dangers posed by dryness. The downpours will spur vegetation to grow with vigor. Without another adequate dousing before the warmer weather sets in, parched plants could fuel the region’s already-high wildfire risks.

For now though, the county is focused on the daunting task at hand. “We have to support everyone in their recovery journey,” he said. “We can’t let anyone slip through the cracks.”

Sandbags still line the doorways of the brightly-colored buildings in the picturesque Capitola Village, which was hammered by surging surf strong enough to sever the town’s iconic pier. The storms also chewed through Seacliff State Beach, shredding a seawall, destroying a campground and smashing the bathrooms at the popular recreation site.

Along the battered shoreline, vast fields of seaweed created by ferocious tides remain piled high. Splintered debris sat alongside the sodden floorboards and crushed tiles that once belonged to waterfront restaurants and homes. In some areas of the county, the waters still have yet to recede.

“Unfortunately, the people who seem to have the least were hurt the most,” said Don Hufgard, a Red Cross volunteer from Ohio, who deployed into California this week to help residents recover from the disaster. He and his partner, who hailed from Indiana, stationed themselves in Soquel Village for part of this week, where they said some areas were still underwater.

In their mission to hand out food and supplies to residents throughout the region, they’ve encountered roads swallowed by sinkholes, landslides, and neighborhoods weary from the weather whiplash that brought devastating floods to previously drought-stricken areas.

“At least it is beautiful out now,” Hufgard said, gesturing to the cloudless sky as he buttoned up the van. He and his partner were heading out to a shelter in Capitola, another community in need.

Even in the cooler winter months, the vibrant coastal town is typically bustling. Now eerily quiet, bird calls echoed against the brightly-painted buildings that line the shore, many of which still have boarded windows and sandbagged doorways.

“You don’t feel it until you walk the streets,” Biden said after he toured the aftermath on Thursday, looking out at Seacliff state park. “We’ve got to not just rebuild, but rebuild better,” the president said, noting that the climate crisis promised a future where storms of this magnitude would become more common.

Locals agree. As the storm surged and the ocean thrashed against the shore, many felt powerless, even after doing what they could to prepare.

“We were getting it from both sides,” said Capitola police chief, Sarah Ryan. In the preceding days, businesses had been boarded and berms were built with sand. Officers went door-to-door in low-lying areas warning residents that it was time to leave. With evacuation orders in place, the community braced itself for the onslaught. “By that point,” Ryan said, “there was really nothing we could do other than let Mother Nature take its course.”

The community is now rethinking what will be required to withstand a future where extreme weather events become more common. “Knowing something like this could very-well happen again, our threshold has now shifted to a different level,” she said. “That is a conversation that is already starting to take place when we talk about recovery.”

Down the road from the police station, where officers were collecting rakes and shovels to be distributed across the small city, neighbors were convening at the bustling Reef Dog Deli, a sandwich shop and community hub in town. Friends and neighbors shared hugs, stories and smiles, now that the sun was shining, as they stopped to marvel at what the storm left in its wake.

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| Return to Top | <p>Owner and chef Anthony Kresge has fostered that happy vibe in his eatery, chatting with all who enter. But, he said, the friendly façade masks the deep hurt this community is feeling. “Inside we are all struggling,” he said. “It has been a tough go but we are trying to be positive.”</p> <p>The catastrophe has changed the community, he said, noting that it was always a welcoming place. But neighbors are now willing to do more to help the village rebound. He and other local business owners have banded together to organize a fundraiser event for the workers left without jobs. “No matter if you were in the flood zone or not, everybody has taken a hit,” he said.</p> <p>He’s concerned about the downturn, but more than that, he is hopeful that the village will have the chance to come back stronger.</p> <p>“Everyone wants Capitola to jump back and be alive again, but it’s going to take some time,” he said, calling the storms a wakeup call. This won’t be the last severe storm the community will have to endure.</p> <p>“We will be stronger in our defense next time,” he added. “Because it is not if – it is when.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/20 Colombia halts new fossil fuel exploration |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/20/colombia-stop-new-oil-gas-exploration-davos |
| GIST | <p>Colombia’s leftwing government has announced that it will not approve any new oil and gas exploration projects as it seeks to shift away from fossil fuels and toward a new sustainable economy.</p> <p>Irene Vélez, the minister for mines told world leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos that the time had come for the Andean nation to move away from its reliance on oil and gas and begin a new, greener chapter in the country’s history.</p> <p>“We have decided not to award new oil and gas exploration contracts, and while that has been very controversial, it’s a clear sign of our commitment in the fight against climate change,” Vélez said during a panel in Davos on Thursday. “This decision is absolutely urgent and needs immediate action.”</p> <p>Colombia’s president, Gustavo Petro, made ending the country’s long history of economic reliance on oil a key part of his campaign before becoming the country’s first leftist leader in August last year.</p> <p>But a fractured congress, increasingly bleak economic outlook and a series of policy U-turns from the government have put Petro’s ambitious environmentally friendly pledge in doubt.</p> <p>The country’s finance minister, José Ocampo, has stepped in on several occasions to contradict government ministers and reassure financial markets after their comments sent the value of the Colombian peso tumbling.</p> <p>Ocampo has repeatedly told reporters that the country remains open to new oil and gas projects as it relies heavily on the sector’s revenue.</p> <p>But Petro backed Vélez’s announcement this week, saying that alternative economies would make up the loss from oil, which accounts for around half of all of Colombia’s total export revenue.</p> <p>“We are convinced that strong investment in tourism, given the beauty of the country, and the capacity and potential that the country has to generate clean energy, could, in the short term, perfectly fill the void left by fossil fuels,” Petro told reporters in Davos.</p> <p>Vélez’s doubling down on the policy has been met with criticism from economic analysts who say that halting oil exploration will not affect the global demand for fossil fuels while hurting Colombia’s economy.</p> |

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| | <p>Colombia should transition toward clean energy but without “killing its golden-egg-laying goose”, Julio César Vera, former president of the Colombian Association of Petroleum Engineers, told Colombian media.</p> <p>The policy has also been criticised by environmental experts who say the move does not address the country’s key environmental issues, such as cattle-ranching and unsustainable agriculture which are driving deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, nor will it have any significant effect on the global climate crisis.</p> <p>“Colombia must not sacrifice its economic growth to make itself the champion of energy transition in Latin America,” said Manuel Rodríguez, who in 1991 became the country’s first environment minister.</p> <p>“This is a childish and populist idea based on a false narrative because according to the studies, we will lose several points of GDP while making next to no effect on the global consumption of fossil fuels. Another oil-producing country will simply make up for Colombia’s shortfall.”</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Day 332 of the Russia invasion |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/21/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-332-of-the-invasion |
| GIST | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia claimed to have captured of a village in eastern Ukraine as part of its months-long push towards the city of Bakhmut. Russian defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Klishchiivka, 9km south of Bakhmut, had been “liberated”. The claim could not be independently verified. Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment. Russian proxy forces in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic earlier said they had taken control of Klishchiivka. • US officials have begun to nudge the Ukrainians to shift focus away from Bakhmut and focus on preparation for an offensive in the south. Joe Biden’s administration reportedly believes there is a high potential for the Russians to eventually push Ukrainian forces out of the hotly contested city, which has seen some of the war’s most intense fighting to date. Germany’s foreign intelligence service, the BND, is also reportedly alarmed by the losses the Ukrainian army is taking in Bakhmut. • Gen Mark Milley, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, said he did not believe it was realistic to expect Ukraine to push Russian troops out of its internationally recognised territory in 2023. “From a military standpoint, I still maintain that from this year it would be very, very difficult to militarily eject Russian forces from every inch of Russian-occupied Ukraine,” he said at a press conference at the Ramstein US air force base in Germany. • Germany has declined to take a decision on whether to give Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine at a special international summit held at Ramstein. It had been hoped in Europe and the US that Germany would at least allow Leopards owned by countries such as Poland and Finland to be re-exported, but despite days of pleading, Berlin’s newly appointed defence minister said no final decision had been taken. • Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, pleaded with Germany and western allies to send their battle tanks to Kyiv at the opening of the meeting in Ramstein. Urgent action was necessary, the Ukrainian leader said, because “Russia is concentrating its forces, last forces, trying to convince everyone that hatred can be stronger than the world”. • The US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, said the group of Kyiv-supporting defence ministers were focused on “making sure that Ukraine has the capability that it needs to be successful right now”. Speaking after the Ramstein airbase meeting, Austin described Germany as a “reliable ally”. • The Kremlin said supplying additional tanks to Kyiv would not “fundamentally change anything”. Russia’s relationship with the US was at its “lowest point historically”, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov also said, with “no hope” of bilateral relations improving “in the foreseeable future”. • A former US navy Seal has been killed in Ukraine, American officials said on Friday. Daniel W Swift, a 1st class petty officer who deserted his post in San Diego in March 2019, was injured |

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| | <p>in Dnipro and died of his wounds on Wednesday. Officials said he was not fighting in an official capacity. The navy said it “cannot speculate as to why the former sailor was in Ukraine”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU countries are reportedly working on a 10th round of Russia-related sanctions. The next package of sanctions “will be somewhere around” the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, one senior diplomat told Reuters. EU officials are also seeking approval from the ministers for a seventh tranche of military aid for Ukraine worth €500m. • The US will impose additional sanctions against the Wagner Group, the White House national security council spokesperson, John Kirby, has said. The US treasury department plans to designate Wagner as a significant transnational criminal organisation, which would freeze any assets the group has in the US and prohibit Americans from providing Wagner with funds, goods or services. • Italian authorities are on the hunt for a Russian oligarch after two of his luxury yachts that were seized under EU sanctions mysteriously disappeared from a port in Sardinia. The yachts, belonging to Dmitry Mazepin, the billionaire owner of a mineral fertiliser company, went missing from the Sardinian port of Olbia within weeks of each other last summer. |
| Return to Top | |

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|-------------------------------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Day 333 of the Russia invasion |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/22/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-333-of-the-invasion |
| GIST | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said that caution and slow decision making over whether to send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine is costing lives. Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted on Saturday his frustration at “global indecision” over arms supply to Ukraine: “Today’s indecision is killing more of our people. Every day of delay is the death of Ukrainians. Think faster.” • Baltic countries have told Germany to send the tanks “now” to Ukraine after perceived heel-dragging by the government in Berlin. The Latvian foreign minister, Edgars Rinkēvičs, tweeted they are “needed to stop Russian aggression”. The same tweet was put out by his counterparts in Estonia and Lithuania. • Joe Biden told reporters after an event on Friday night that “Ukraine is going to get all the help they need,” in response to a question about the tanks. • The German defence minister, Boris Pistorius said that despite heightened expectations “we still cannot say when a decision will be taken, and what the decision will be, when it comes to the Leopard tank”. Germany has said it is doing a stocktake of its current tank numbers ahead of a possible decision. • Some 50 nations agreed on Friday to provide Kyiv with billions of dollars’ worth of military hardware, including armoured vehicles and munitions needed to push back Russian forces. • A tearful Volodymyr Zelenskiy attended a memorial service on Saturday to commemorate seven senior interior ministry officials killed in a helicopter crash on Wednesday, Reuters reported. The interior minister, Denys Monastyrskyi, his deputy and five others were killed when their helicopter plummeted amid fog into a nursery on the eastern outskirts of Kyiv. Including those on the ground, a total of 14 people were killed. • Agence France-Presse has reported the Russian army as saying its troops have launched an offensive in the Zaporizhzhia region in south-east Ukraine. Russian forces claimed to have taken “more advantageous lines and positions” during the assault. • A 17-year-old boy has been injured by Russian shelling of Sumy oblast, Ukraine. • Russian attacks on Friday killed one person in Kharkiv, three people in Donetsk and one person in Zaporizhzhia. Four were also injured in Kherson, according to Zelenskiy’s office. • The war in Ukraine is in a state of deadlock, according to the UK Ministry of Defence. In an intelligence update, it said there was a possibility of Russian advances around the heavily contested city of Bakhmut in the Donbas region, but otherwise little movement. • Near Kremina in the north-east, Ukraine’s forces have made small gains and defended against Russian counterattacks. |
| Return to Top | |

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Police violently raid Lima university |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/22/peru-police-make-violent-raid-on-limas-san-marcos-university |
| GIST | <p>Scores of police raided a Lima university on Saturday, smashing down the gates with an armoured vehicle, firing teargas and detaining more than 200 people who had come to the Peruvian capital to take part in anti-government protests.</p> <p>Images showed dozens of people lying face down on the ground at San Marcos University after the surprise police operation. Students said they were pushed, kicked and hit with truncheons as they were forced out of their dormitories.</p> <p>The police raid on San Marcos University – the oldest in the Americas – is the latest in a series of affronts driving growing calls for the president, Dina Boluarte, to step down after six weeks of unrest that has claimed 60 lives, while leaving at least 580 injured and more than 500 arrested.</p> <p>Amid the demonstrations and with roadblocks paralysing much of the country, Peruvian authorities on Saturday ordered the closure “until further notice” of the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu and the Inca trail that leads to the world heritage archeological site – Peru’s biggest tourist attraction which brings in more than a million visitors a year.</p> <p>Rescue teams on Saturday had evacuated more than 400 tourists stranded at the iconic site, Peru’s ministry of tourism said.</p> <p>“This afternoon the 418 domestic and foreign visitors were transferred from the town of Machu Picchu to ... Cusco,” the ministry’s Twitter account posted, along with photos of a train and passengers.</p> <p>The demonstrations began in early December in support of the ousted former president Pedro Castillo but have shifted overwhelmingly to demand Boluarte’s resignation, the closure of Congress and fresh elections. Boluarte was Castillo’s vice-president and replaced him after he attempted to shutter congress and rule by decree on 7 December.</p> <p>Many of those arrested in Saturday’s raid had travelled from southern Peru to the capital to take part in a demonstration last Thursday labelled the “takeover of Lima” which began peacefully but descended into running battles between protesters and riot police amid stone-throwing and swirls of teargas.</p> <p>In a statement on Twitter, the office of the UN high commissioner for human rights called on the Peruvian authorities to “ensure the legality and proportionality of the [police] intervention and guarantees of due process”. It emphasised the importance of the presence of prosecutors, who were absent for the first hours of the raid.</p> <p>Students living in halls of residence said they were violently forced out of their rooms by armed police who busted in doors and used shoves and kicks to eject them.</p> <p>Esteban Godofredo, a 20-year-old political science student, was given medical treatment for injuries to his leg. “He hit me with his stick and he threw me to the ground and started kicking me,” Godofredo said as he sat on the grass outside the residence with a heavily bruised, bandaged right calf.</p> <p>Videos seen by the Guardian showed confused and terrified students massed outside their halls, some still in pyjamas, as riot police shouted orders and insults. Young men were forced to stand against a wall or kneel in a row.</p> <p>“They pointed their guns at us, and shouted, ‘Out out.’ We didn’t even have time to get our IDs,” said Jenny Fuentes, 20, a student teacher. “They forced us to kneel. Many of the girls were crying but they told us to shut up.”</p> |

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| | <p>“They didn’t tell us why we were being forced out of our rooms,” she said. The group of about 90 students, who had remained on campus during the summer holidays to work and study, were then marched to the main patio, a 10-minute walk, where the other people had been detained.</p> <p>Several hours after the raid, they had not been allowed to return to their rooms which were being searched by police.</p> <p>“I have been a student at San Marcos [University] and since the 1980s we have not experienced such an outrage,” Susel Paredes, a congresswoman, said as she was prevented from entering the campus by a police cordon.</p> <p>“The police have entered the university residence, the rooms of the female students who had nothing to do with the demonstrators. They have threatened them and taken them out of their rooms while they were sleeping.”</p> <p>Paredes said it was a flashback to regular police and armed forces raids on the public university in the 1980s and 90s, when the campus was seen as a hotbed for subversion during the state’s conflict with the Mao-inspired Shining Path rebels.</p> <p>“We are not in that time, we are supposedly under a democratic government that should respect fundamental rights,” Paredes said.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Classified documents Biden senate days |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/21/six-newly-discovered-classified-documents-removed/ |
| GIST | <p>A new search of President Biden’s home in Wilmington, Delaware turned up six previously undiscovered classified documents, including some from his days in the U.S. Senate, Mr. Biden’s personal attorney Bob Bauer said Saturday.</p> <p>Justice Department investigators seized the newly discovered documents, which date back to his time in the U.S. Senate and as vice president, during a 13-hours search of the residence on Friday, according to Mr. Bauer. The search included all living, working and storage areas of the house, Mr. Bauer said in a lengthy statement.</p> <p>Mr. Biden’s tenure in the U.S. Senate, where he represented Delaware, lasted from 1973 to 2009. During his time in the Senate he, at times, chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which oversees foreign-policy legislation, including funding arms sales and training for U.S. allies.</p> <p>Investigators also took “personally handwritten notes” by Mr. Biden, from his time as vice president, Mr. Bauer said. The search began at 9:45 a.m. and concluded around 10:30 p.m. according to the statement.</p> <p>“D.O.J. had full access to the president’s home, including personally handwritten notes, files, papers, binders, memorabilia, to-do lists, schedules, and reminders going back decades,” Mr. Bauer said.</p> <p>The documents are the latest classified government records discovered this month at Mr. Biden’s home. It brings the total number of classified documents discovered at Mr. Biden’s Wilmington residence to at least 12.</p> <p>Another batch of classified documents had been found in November at a private office Mr. Biden maintained at a Washington, D.C. think tank after ending his tenure as vice president in the Obama administration in 2017. That discovery touched off a frantic hunt for additional documents, leading Mr. Biden’s attorneys to search his homes in Wilmington and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.</p> <p>The previous searches were carried out by Mr. Biden’s attorneys. On Friday, the Justice Department conducted the search of Mr. Biden’s house at the invitation of his legal team.</p> |

It is the first publicly known search for sensitive government documents conducted by federal law enforcement authorities at Mr. Biden's private addresses. The search also marks a major escalation of the Justice Department's investigation into the potentially illegal mishandling of government documents.

Mr. Bauer, in his statement, said the president's legal team offered to provide investigators with "prompt access" to the residence to allow the Justice Department "to conduct a search of the entire premises for potential vice presidential records and potential classified material."

The offer, Mr. Bauer said, was made "in the interest of moving the process forward as expeditiously as possible." It also raises questions about the thoroughness of the two earlier searches of Mr. Biden's home conducted by his attorneys.

Mr. Bauer did not say what triggered the search on Friday, which is the fourth publicly known search of Mr. Biden's properties.

Attorney General Merrick Garland earlier this month appointed a special counsel to investigate the matter.

Federal law strictly forbids the removal or retention of classified documents or materials outside secured locations without authorization, which Mr. Biden would not have had during his tenure as vice president in the Obama White House.

A separate statement from Richard Sauber, a member of the White House Counsel's Office, said neither the president nor first lady Jill Biden was home at the residence at the time of the search.

"The President's lawyers and White House Counsel's Office will continue to cooperate with DOJ and the Special Counsel to help ensure this process is conducted swiftly and efficiently," Mr. Sauber said.

Mr. and Mrs. Biden spent the weekend at their home in Rehoboth Beach. The unusual trip to the beach resort in the dead of winter fueled speculation that the Bidens' choice to spend the weekend at their beach home might be related to the classified document drama.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on Friday declined to answer questions about why the Bidens were spending the weekend in Rehoboth Beach instead of his Wilmington residence, where he typically relaxes.

"As it relates specifically to the investigation I would refer you to the Department of Justice, so I'm not going to — not going to comment on that piece at all from here," Ms. Jean-Pierre said.

"As it relates to his travel, as you know, he often travels to Delaware on the weekends," she added. "I just don't have anything else to share."

The search of Mr. Biden's residence by law enforcement will inevitably draw comparisons to the raid on former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence in August.

The FBI obtained a warrant to search Mr. Trump's Florida residence because investigators had evidence suggesting that the former president had not handed over all classified materials in his possession after receiving a subpoena from the National Archives. Mr. Trump's potentially illegal handling of classified materials is also the subject of a special counsel investigation.

Republicans will likely have new ammunition against Mr. Biden with the discovery of the additional documents.

House Oversight Committee Chairman Rep. James Comer, Kentucky Republican, is leading Congress's investigation into the documents drama and has demanded that Mr. Biden and his legal team provide more information to Congress.

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| | <p>“It is troubling that classified documents have been improperly stored at the home of President Biden for at least six years, raising questions about who may have reviewed or had access to classified information,” Mr. Comer wrote in a letter to White House chief of staff Ron Klain.</p> <p>Mr. Biden told reporters this week that he had “no regrets” about how the White House had handled the matter. He promised to cooperate with the Justice Department and expressed confidence that it would be resolved soon.</p> <p>“I think you’re going to find there’s nothing there,” Mr. Biden said in his most extensive comments since the matter became public on Jan. 9.</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Pandemic free school lunch meals end |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/us/politics/universal-school-meals-free-lunches.html |
| GIST | <p>Like other parents, April Vazquez, a school nutrition specialist in Sioux Falls, S.D., is cutting coupons, buying in bulk and forgoing outings and restaurant meals. Still, a hot lunch in the school cafeteria for her three children is now a treat she has to carefully plan in her budget.</p> <p>The expiration of waivers that guaranteed free school meals for nearly 30 million students across the United States during the pandemic has meant that families like Ms. Vazquez’s who earn just over the income threshold no longer qualify for a federal program allowing children to eat at no cost.</p> <p>As pandemic-era assistance programs lapse and inflation reaches record highs, Ms. Vazquez is hardly alone. The number of students receiving free lunches decreased by about a third, to around 18.6 million in October, the latest month with available data. In comparison, about 20.3 million students ate free in October 2019, before the pandemic. That drop can be attributed to several factors, like being on the cusp of eligibility, lack of awareness that the program had ended by the start of the school year and fewer schools participating in the program overall.</p> <p>“It’s just making things a hell of a lot harder at the most difficult moment that I think American families have seen in a generation,” said Keri Rodrigues, co-founder and president of the National Parents Union network.</p> <p>For Ms. Vazquez, returning to a reality where she must pay full price for a school meal — about \$3 or \$4 for each child — is trying, and most days, her children bring a packed lunch. (Bagels, cream cheese and apples are typical; grapes and strawberries are rare because they are too expensive.)</p> <p>“It’s painful to know that my kids aren’t going to get free or reduced,” she said.</p> <p>Before the pandemic, Ms. Vazquez worked part-time as a special education assistant and her children teetered between qualifying for free or reduced-price meals year to year. But when she took a full-time job as a nutritionist in August 2021, her salary was just enough to bump her family above the income threshold for either benefit: about \$42,000 annually for free meals for a family of five and \$60,000 for reduced-price meals.</p> <p>“That was actually a worry when I applied for this position, because you don’t know what’s going to happen, am I going to get disqualified for this?” she said, adding that she ultimately took the job with a view toward long-term financial stability.</p> <p>Even as some parents have seen their wages increase and the criteria for free and reduced-price meals expand, those boons have done little to blunt the impact of rising food costs.</p> <p>From the 2019-20 school year to this school year, the income eligibility for free and reduced-price meals has increased by about 7.8 percent. Average hourly wage growth in that same period grew by 15.1</p> |

percent. [Consumer prices](#), though, have risen by 15.4 percent, and [food prices](#) by 20.2 percent, surpassing wage growth.

In the Sioux Falls School District — where Ms. Vazquez works and where her children attend school — about 41 percent of children qualified for free or reduced-price lunch this school year, compared with about 49 percent before the pandemic, said its nutrition director, Gay Anderson. Some parents have remarked that they would be “better off missing half a week’s work to get that free meal,” she said.

“The income eligibility guidelines are just not keeping pace with inflation, and families are barely making ends meet. So what we’re seeing is a lot of people are saying, ‘I can’t believe I don’t qualify as I always did.’ If they are making a dollar more, or whatever, that will do it,” Ms. Anderson said.

At Wellington Exempted Village Schools in northeastern Ohio, Andrea Helton, the nutrition director, described denying the program to nearly 50 families in a school district of about 1,000 students. She recalled a single mother who lamented, “I missed the cutoff for reduced meals by \$100 of gross income.” But Ms. Helton said, “There’s nothing I can do, and it’s heartbreaking.”

Families are also struggling to navigate a maze of new rules or, unaware that the program had ended, contending with having to pay for meals that had once been free.

Megan, a mother of three school-aged children in Ms. Helton’s district who asked to be identified only by her first name because of privacy concerns, said that she had grown accustomed to the program. So when the school pressed her for money owed for unpaid lunches, “it was a shocker.”

By the end of the fall semester, she had racked up \$136 in debt.

When Megan learned that holiday donations to the school district had wiped out that sum, “I just melted into a puddle because when you’re down to that last \$100, the last thing you want to have to worry about is whether your kids are eating or not,” she said through tears.

It is difficult to estimate how many students are now going hungry. But school officials and nutrition advocates point to proxy measurements — debt owed by families who cannot afford a school meal, for example, or the number of applications for free and reduced-price meals — as evidence of unmet need.

In [a survey released this month](#) by the School Nutrition Association, 96.3 percent of school districts reported that meal debt had increased. Median debt rose to \$5,164 per district through November, already higher than the \$3,400 median reported for the entire school year in [the group’s 2019 survey](#).

At school, Ms. Vazquez described witnessing children sitting in the cafeteria with packed lunches consisting of only a bag of chips or an apple. Others have inched toward the cash register with a lunch tray, a look of fear and recognition flashing across the “kid’s eyes when they see the computer, like, ‘Yeah, I know I’m negative, but I want to eat,’” she said.

“You see other kids struggle and knowing, hey, I’m in the same boat,” she added. “I know exactly what you’re going through.”

The end of universal school meals has led fewer schools to participate in the program overall: About 88 percent of public schools are operating a meal program this school year, compared with 94 percent in the previous school year, and 27.4 million children were eating a school lunch in October, compared with about 30 million in May, the last month of the school year with the program in place.

That can create a vicious cycle in which lower participation translates to higher costs per meal, forcing schools to raise the price of a meal and squeezing out even more families, said Crystal FitzSimons of the Food Research and Action Center, which routinely talks to schools about their nutrition programs.

Schools and families alike face other administrative and financial complications as school officials grapple with soaring wholesale costs and labor shortages, highlighting other challenges in increasing participation. Now officials must process paperwork to verify income eligibility, devote time and personnel for debt collection and plan ahead for expected revenue and reimbursement rates.

At Prince William County Schools in Virginia, Adam T. Russo, the nutrition director, said his office has had to dedicate more resources for outreach and education to inform parents of the policy change. Already, he relies on a multilingual staff to serve the 90,000 students in his district, one of the most diverse in the state.

For many parents, he said, the process was new and potentially confusing given that universal free meals had been in place since some of their children had started school.

“If your kid was in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, this is a completely foreign process to your family,” he said. “It’s been table stakes, and we’ve pulled the tablecloth out from under our families.”

The application process, as well as the stigma associated with receiving a free or reduced-price lunch, can be prohibitive, advocates say. In 2019, even as some 29.6 million students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, only 22 million received one, [according to research](#). And [about 20 percent of eligible households](#) whose children did not receive either benefit reported food insecurity.

“The effort it takes to make sure these resources actually hit those kids, for what that costs, it’s a hell of a lot easier to just say, listen, food is free,” Ms. Rodrigues said.

The universal free school meal program pushed the federal cost of school nutrition programs from \$18.7 billion in the 2019 fiscal year to \$28.7 billion in the 2022 fiscal year, [according to data from the Agriculture Department](#), which administers the program. The department does not have an official estimate of the cost of permanently enacting the policy, a spokeswoman said.

Such an initiative has drawn widespread support, with polls showing [74 percent of voters](#) and [90 percent of parents favoring the idea](#), but federal enactment seems unlikely. Republican lawmakers in Congress oppose permanently extending the policy, arguing that free meals should serve only the neediest and that pandemic-era policies must eventually end.

Still, some states — and some parents — have been spurred to take action. For Amber Stewart, a mother of five in Duluth, Minn., the program was lifesaving.

Before the pandemic, when the family owed money for meals, her daughter would receive a cold cheese sandwich and a carton of milk, signaling to classmates she could not afford the hot meal. Stern letters demanded repayment and warned of consequences.

“Then the pandemic rolled around and everybody was eligible for the free meals, and they delivered it or you could go pick it up,” said Ms. Stewart, who asked to be identified by her maiden name. “It was amazing.”

Intent on seeing the program enacted permanently, Ms. Stewart is now lobbying the Minnesota legislature to adopt [universal free schools meals](#) statewide, a policy that the governor recently endorsed.

Under the new income guidelines, Ms. Stewart’s children now qualify for reduced-price meals. And because of a state law that covers the fees normally owed by families in that category, they are not charged the 35 or 50 cents for breakfast or lunch.

That has been crucial, she said, because even after weekly trips to the food bank, she does not have nearly enough to get by.

“Our money is really tight,” she said. “With the cost of groceries and everything, we’re barely making it.”

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| HEADLINE | 01/20 US: Wagner 'transnational criminal' entity |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/20/wagner-group-sanctions/ |
| GIST | <p>The United States will designate Russia's Wagner mercenary group a "transnational criminal organization," the White House said Friday, an attempt to disrupt the cash and weapons flow of a private military outfit prosecuting President Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine with an army of convicts and contractors.</p> <p>The designation will come alongside additional U.S. sanctions against Wagner and its support network, spanning multiple continents, said John Kirby, coordinator for strategic communications at the White House National Security Council. The Treasury Department intends to formalize the penalties next week.</p> <p>Speaking at a White House news briefing, Kirby said the designation would open up "additional avenues" for the United States to go after Wagner's business activities around the world, and give other nations and institutions the firepower to follow suit.</p> <p>"These actions recognize the transcontinental threat that Wagner poses, including through its ongoing pattern of serious criminal activity," Kirby said. He noted the Russian mercenary group had carried out "atrocities and human rights abuses in Ukraine, and of course elsewhere around the world."</p> <p>The action comes a month after the Commerce Department imposed new restrictions on Wagner, designating the group a Russian "military end user" to hinder the mercenaries' ability to acquire items that use U.S. technology.</p> <p>At Friday's briefing, Kirby also displayed photos depicting what he said were five Russian rail cars traveling from Russia into North Korea on Nov. 18 and returning along the same route the following day. He said those rail cars carried an initial delivery of North Korean infantry rockets and missiles for use by Wagner fighters in Ukraine.</p> <p>Kirby said the arms transfers stood in "direct violation" of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Washington on Friday shared information regarding the prohibited activity with the Security Council's North Korea sanctions committee panel of experts, Kirby said.</p> <p>The Biden administration first alleged last month that North Korea was making weapons deliveries to Wagner. Pyongyang's denials are false, Kirby said, pointing to the newly released imagery as proof of the U.S. allegation.</p> <p>"We obviously condemn North Korea's actions, and we urge North Korea to cease these deliveries to Wagner immediately," Kirby said.</p> <p>Since its first appearance in Ukraine in 2014, Wagner has risen to international renown as a ruthless shadow instrument of Russian power that has been accused of human rights abuses in Syria, Mali, Central African Republic and Ukraine.</p> <p>Its founder, Yevgeniy Prigozhin, spent nine years in prison for robbery and other crimes, before operating a hot dog stand, casinos and a floating restaurant in post-Soviet St. Petersburg, where he came to know Putin.</p> <p>Prigozhin's company, Concord Catering, won contracts with Russian state and municipal entities. Meanwhile, the former convict and caterer meddled in foreign affairs, funding the notorious St. Petersburg troll farm, the Internet Research Agency, which interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and also backing Wagner, which swelled into a large battlefield force in Ukraine this past year after Putin allowed him to recruit convicts directly from Russian prisons.</p> |

The mercenary group — which U.S. officials say now has 40,000 convicts and 10,000 contractors deployed to Ukraine — for months has been waging [a brutal and costly battle](#) against Ukrainian forces in the city of Bakhmut. Wagner recently made gains in the area, pushing into neighboring Soledar.

“They are both mining towns — gypsum in Bakhmut and salt up in Soledar,” Kirby said. “We think that also has a role to play in why Mr. Prigozhin is so adamant on pouring, literally just throwing bodies into a meat grinder to get these two towns. It’s very much in keeping with his modus operandi in places like Africa, where he is going after mining rights and mining capabilities.”

Prigozhin responded in a statement Friday posted on his catering company’s VK page, in which he appeared to liken the United States itself to a criminal organization.

“Finally, the Wagner private military company and the Americans are colleagues,” Prigozhin said. “From now on, our relationship can be called a ‘showdown between criminal clans.’”

The pending designation follows months of tension between Prigozhin and the Russian Ministry of Defense. Prigozhin has assailed the Russian military for incompetent management of the war effort, and according to U.S. intelligence [revealed last year](#) by The Washington Post, has voiced similar criticisms personally to Putin. He has become a public figure in Russia after years of operating in the shadows.

Kirby said Friday that Russia has been searching for foreign weaponry to fuel its war effort in part through Wagner, which has long mixed business with private military power.

“To any company considering providing support to Wagner, our message is this,” Kirby said. “Wagner is a criminal organization that is committing widespread atrocities and human rights abuses, and we will work relentlessly to identify, disrupt, expose and target those who are assisting Wagner.”

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Serbian mercenaries train w/Russia troops? |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/20/world/russia-ukraine-news?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing#video-of-serbian-mercenaries-training-with-russian-troops-stirs-anger-in-belgrade |
| GIST | <p>Video footage released by Russian state media that purports to show Serbian mercenaries training for battle alongside Moscow’s troops in Ukraine has outraged authorities in Serbia, which has spent years trying to join the European Union and shed its reputation as a Kremlin supporter.</p> <p>President Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia has been long caught among competing forces — his country’s historical ties to Russia, his own past links to violent Serb nationalism and his ambitions to join the E.U.</p> <p>But this week he denounced what he said was an unwelcome campaign to recruit Serbian volunteers by the Wagner private military company, a mercenary force run by a close ally of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.</p> <p>“Why do you from Wagner call anyone from Serbia when you know that it is against our regulations?” Mr. Vucic asked earlier this week on Happy, a Serbian television channel. Serbian law, he said, prohibits Serbs from fighting in Ukrainian territory. Mr. Vucic denied that Wagner recruiters were in Serbia.</p> <p>Wagner, which has fronted Russia’s monthslong offensive to seize the eastern Ukrainian town of Bakhmut, has released videos in Serbian and has posted online messages in a campaign for Serb recruits, Serbian media reported. Wagner, run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman known as “Putin’s cook” because of his catering contracts with the Kremlin and Russian military, earlier recruited convicts from Russian prisons.</p> |

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| | <p>Footage broadcast by the Russian state news agency RIA showed masked men who identified themselves as Serbian volunteers on a weapons training course in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region.</p> <p>Russian nationalist groups sent volunteer fighters to help Serbia during the Balkan wars of the early 1990s after the collapse of Yugoslavia. But relations between Moscow and Belgrade have often been tense, characterized by declarations of eternal Pan-Slavic solidarity and frequent complaints of betrayal.</p> <p>The European Union has reacted to Russia's invasion by imposing economic sanctions against Moscow, but Serbia has declined to join. Also, Serbia's national airline, Air Serbia, offers Europe's only direct flights to Moscow. Mr. Vucic, in an interview with The Times last year, said he was ready to align Serbia with Europe over Ukraine but only if his country's stalled 14-year-old application to join the E.U. gained traction.</p> <p>In a sign that he might be serious about ditching Russia in favor of the West, Mr. Vucic last year dropped Aleksandar Vulin, a hawkish nationalist with close ties to Russia's security apparatus, as Serbia's interior minister. Instead, Mr. Vulin, a longtime ally but also a potential rival to Mr. Vucic, was selected as head of Serbia's powerful intelligence service.</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 US: 'very difficult' eject Russia out Ukraine |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/20/world/russia-ukraine-news?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing#the-uss-top-general-says-it-would-be-very-very-difficult-to-eject-russian-forces-from-ukraine-this-year |
| GIST | <p>The top general in the United States said on Friday that it would be "very, very difficult" for Ukraine to oust Russian forces from its territory this year, increasing the likelihood that any quick resolution to the conflict would come through negotiations rather than on the battlefield.</p> <p>"For this year, it would be very, very difficult to militarily eject the Russian forces from every inch of Russian-occupied Ukraine," Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters after a meeting of Ukraine's allies at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. "That doesn't mean it can't happen, doesn't mean it won't happen, but it would be very, very difficult."</p> <p>A more likely scenario, General Milley said, is that Ukraine will stabilize the front lines as it integrates the military assistance promised this week by many Western nations.</p> <p>Although Western defense officials at Ramstein on Friday could not agree on giving German- or American-made battle tanks to Ukraine, the country's allies pledged to provide a large amount of heavy weaponry to help Ukraine defend itself against an expected spring offensive by Russia.</p> <p>Britain pledged to send 14 of its Challenger 2 tank. The Pentagon said it would send 90 Stryker armored fighting vehicles and 50 Bradley fighting vehicles, among other weapons, as part of a \$2.5 billion military aid package.</p> <p>General Milley said the Ukrainian forces were receiving enough equipment from the West to push the Russians back along a curving front line that extends for hundreds of miles from Kharkiv in the north to Kherson in the south.</p> <p>"Depending on the delivery and training of all of this equipment, I do think it's very, very possible for the Ukrainians to run a significant tactical- or even operational-level offensive operation to liberate as much Ukrainian territory as possible," General Milley said. "And then we'll see where it goes."</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 AWOL Navy SEAL killed in Ukraine |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/20/world/europe/navy-seal-killed-ukraine.html |
| GIST | <p>A former U.S. Navy SEAL who deserted in 2019 was killed in Ukraine this week, the Navy said in a brief statement on Friday.</p> <p>The SEAL, Daniel W. Swift, died on Wednesday, the Navy said, making him the latest American to be killed in Ukraine, where hundreds of international volunteers have gone to fight in Ukraine's defense.</p> <p>Mr. Swift's death was first reported by Time, which said he had been fighting with Ukrainian forces. The Navy said he had gone absent without leave and had been listed as an "active deserter" since March 11, 2019.</p> <p>The U.S. State Department confirmed a "recent death of a U.S. citizen fighting in Ukraine" without naming Mr. Swift, and said it was providing consular assistance to the family.</p> <p>Navy records show that Mr. Swift was from Oregon and enlisted in 2005. He was a special warfare operator first class and held among his commendations a Legion of Merit award, as well as campaign medals for service in Iraq and Afghanistan.</p> <p>Navy SEALs, like other elite commando units, are highly trained and conduct some of the military's most dangerous and secretive missions.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 NATO alliance over Ukraine: cracks emerge |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/20/us/politics/nato-alliance-ukraine.html |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — The billions of dollars in new arms for Ukraine announced this month — including British tanks, American fighting vehicles and howitzers from Denmark and Sweden — are testament to President Vladimir V. Putin's failure to split the NATO allies after nearly a year of war. But small yet significant fractures are getting too big to hide.</p> <p>The differences are over strategy for the coming year and the more immediate question of what Ukraine needs in the next few months, as both sides in the war prepare for major offensives in the spring. And while most of those debates take place behind closed doors, Britain's impatience with the current pace of aid and Germany's refusal to provide Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine broke out into public view this week.</p> <p>When the new British foreign secretary, James Cleverly, visited Washington this week, he gathered reporters for lunch and made the case that it is possible for Ukraine to score a "victory" in the war this year if the allies move fast to exploit Russia's weaknesses. Officials in Poland, the Baltic States and Finland have largely agreed with the British assessment.</p> <p>American officials pushed back, saying it is critical to pace the aid, and not flood Ukraine with equipment its troops cannot yet operate. And they argue that in a world of limited resources, it would be wise to keep something in reserve for what the Pentagon believes will likely be a drawn-out conflict, in which Russia will try to wear Ukraine down with relentless barrages and tactics reminiscent of World War I and II.</p> <p>On Friday, at the conclusion of a meeting in Germany of the dozens of nations supplying the war effort, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark A. Milley, repeated the assessment he has offered since the fall.</p> <p>"For this year it would be very, very difficult to militarily eject the Russian forces," he said. The best that could be hoped for is pressing Russia into a diplomatic negotiation — the way most wars end — though senior American diplomats say they have low expectations that Mr. Putin will enter serious talks.</p> |

Then came the more immediate blowup with the German government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, over his refusal to send what many military experts believe could be a decisive weapon in Ukrainian hands: the German-built Leopard 2 tanks.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spent several days trying to persuade the Germans to ship them, or at least allow Poland and other nations that use the tanks to re-export them. But by the time the meeting with scores of allies ended, the German defense minister, Boris Pistorius, reported that no agreement had been reached, although he said they would make a decision “as soon as possible.” He and Mr. Austin tried to focus on the unity of the effort to confront Russia, rather than the obvious rift over arms.

Differences of strategy among wartime allies are the norm, not the exception. In World War II there were major debates about whether to focus on defeating Nazi Germany first, and turn to Japan — which had actually attacked American territory — second. Similar debates happened during the Korean War, Vietnam and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because the United States was providing the bulk of the fighting force, it usually prevailed.

But in interviews with American, British and other European officials, including senior military leaders, it is clear that Ukraine is different. Only the Ukrainians are on the line, and no one wants to tell them how to fight a battle in which their forces, the only ones engaged in the daily brutality, have shown both grit and determination. But with both Russia and Ukraine planning fresh offensives, the debate over strategy and arms has reached what the NATO secretary general has called “an inflection point.”

The Ukrainians have made no secret that much as they appreciate the support of their allies, what they are getting is not enough. When Britain announced earlier this week that it was sending Challenger 2 tanks, Ukraine’s foreign minister and defense ministers issued a joint statement thanking the British government but adding that “it is not sufficient to achieve operational goals.”

Ukraine’s leader, Volodymyr Zelensky, was typically blunt. After thanking the United States for a \$2.5 billion contribution of arms, atop \$3 billion announced several weeks ago, he said: “Hundreds of thank yous are not hundreds of tanks.”

In an appearance on German television, he said: “If you have Leopards, then give them to us.”

American officials were clearly frustrated after their negotiations with the German government this week. Germany had begun by saying that it would send Leopard tanks, and authorize others to, if the United States sent its M-1 Abrams tank as well. The United States declined, saying the tank is such a gas guzzler — it employs a jet engine — and requires such a supply line to keep running that it would not be useful in Ukraine’s environment. (The officials dodged questions about why a tank so difficult to operate on European battlefields is in the American arsenal.)

The British Challengers and German Leopards are more flexible and easier to run. But in public, Mr. Austin and others avoided criticizing Mr. Scholz, who in their view has managed the biggest reversal of German foreign policy — starting with the suspension of two pipelines bringing gas from Russia — quite skillfully.

Mr. Scholz’s real concern, they suspect, is that he does not believe the world is ready to see German tanks near the borders of Russia, a reminder of the Nazi invasion in World War II. One senior American official said this week that if Mr. Scholz and the German public are worried about that, in these circumstances “they are the only ones who are.”

While Germany did not say yes to sending Leopard tanks this week, it didn’t say no, either — at least not yet. But Ukraine has a very narrow window of time in which to launch a potentially decisive spring offensive before the Russians do, and the tanks are a key part of that effort.

Before that launch, Ukraine has to muster thousands of combat-ready troops, receive new advanced weapons from the West, and train their soldiers in how to use and maintain those arms. Getting all that done would be, according to General Milley, “a very, very heavy lift.”

That’s why Germany’s delay on approving tanks was so frustrating to Mr. Austin and other top Western officials who had been trying all week to reach an agreement with their German counterparts to provide what Ukraine needs now to wrest back territory.

“If we stop now or limit or diminish it, it will all have been in vain,” Wopke Hoekstra, the Dutch foreign affairs minister, said in an interview. “We have to double down. There is no substitute for victory on the battlefield.”

Speaking about the current German position, a British official said that London’s commitment to send Challenger tanks was intended to encourage other nations to do likewise, and that the British government still hoped it would.

At a news conference after Friday’s meeting, Mr. Austin sought to play down the importance of the Leopard tanks and highlight what Germany has provided — fighting vehicles, air defenses and training ranges for Ukrainian soldiers — no doubt hoping Berlin eventually would come around on Ukraine’s main request.

“This isn’t really about one single platform,” Mr. Austin said, quickly pivoting to note that Ukraine was still getting more than 100 Bradley fighting vehicles and nearly 90 Stryker combat vehicles from the United States, the equivalent of “two brigades of combat power.”

Still, Mr. Austin signaled the calendar is not on Ukraine’s side. “We have a window of opportunity here, between now and the spring,” he said. “That’s not a long time.”

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Malawi confronts resurgence of cholera |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/world/africa/malawi-cholera-outbreak.html |
| GIST | <p>Many patients arrive in wheelchairs, their legs too weak to support them. They cram into a stale hospital tent in Malawi’s capital, where some of the dozens of people not lucky enough to get a bed suffer on the dirt floor.</p> <p>Medical workers, far outnumbered by the sick, scurry from one to the next, hoping to prevent them from ending up among the dead in a tent nearby.</p> <p>“It’s scary what’s happening,” said Patrick Manuel, 35, holding vigil at his nephew’s bedside recently in the hospital tent. “Today alone I have seen seven people die.”</p> <p>Not long ago, Malawi looked like a shining success story in the global fight against cholera, a largely waterborne bacterial disease that mostly affects low-income countries. National vaccination and sanitation efforts had all but eradicated the disease in Malawi, reducing the number of recorded cases to only two in 2021.</p> <p>Over the past 11 months, though, this landlocked sliver of a nation in southern Africa has recorded more than 28,000 cholera infections and at least 900 deaths. Health experts say cholera typically kills only about 1 percent of infected people. But the death rate in Malawi has been three times that, hovering around 3.3 percent, with hospitals lacking basic supplies and many people seeking help only after falling very ill. It is the country’s worst cholera outbreak in two decades.</p> <p>Malawi’s number of available vaccines has not kept pace with demand. Hospitals are stretched thin, with undertrained and overworked medical staff, and lack basic supplies like gloves and intravenous fluids.</p> |

Emergency cholera tents like the one at Bwaila District Hospital in the capital, Lilongwe, have popped up across the country.

“The conditions are dire,” said Mirjam Molenaar, a Doctors Without Borders coordinator working on the emergency response. “The staff is doing the best they can under this situation, but they are clearly overwhelmed.”

While [cholera has surged across the world](#) — with [outbreaks](#) in 31 countries over the past year — Malawi stands out as a warning of how suddenly the disease can consume even countries that had nearly eliminated it. A bad outbreak can sweep through a nation as long as there remain communities lacking access to clean water and sanitary bathrooms, experts say.

Several years ago, Malawi conducted a campaign to vaccinate millions against cholera and help dozens of communities gain access to toilets and clean drinking water.

“Maybe we didn’t do enough,” said Dr. Charles Mwansambo, the principal secretary in Malawi’s Ministry of Health.

Public health experts and government officials point to several potential causes of the outbreak, including destructive storms, the disruptions of the coronavirus pandemic, a rapid rise in urbanization and a decrease in the population’s immunity.

The outbreak [is significant](#) not only for the number of infections and deaths, but also for the contagion’s wide range — all 29 of Malawi’s administrative districts have recorded cases, upending life in a nation of about 20 million people.

Schools closed for about two weeks this month in major urban centers. Some food vendors were shut down. The simple task of getting drinking water suddenly carried the weight of a life-or-death undertaking.

When nausea struck Wezi Masese, 22, recently as he finished housework, in a township of tightly packed, low-slung homes, he felt as if he were on the edge of death. He vomited, collapsed into bed and could not get up, he said. He had no money loaded onto his cellphone to call for help.

Luckily, a friend who had been expecting to hear from him that day stopped by and discovered him. “If only he would have delayed coming for another hour, I could have passed out,” Mr. Masese said. “I could have been gone — dead.”

Malawi’s government issued an open plea to the public, companies and others this month for donations of basic medical and sanitary supplies, like soap, buckets and aprons.

Those kinds of appeals are far overdue, according to critics who say the government’s slow response contributed to the current crisis.

“My sense is that nobody really had estimated that it would go this bad,” said Dr. Adamson Muula, a professor of epidemiology at Kamuzu University of Health Sciences in Blantyre, Malawi’s second-largest city. “They thought that it was one of those things that come and go. But then it’s gone to where it is unmanageable.”

The key to preventing cholera is keeping human waste away from drinking and washing water. That can be difficult in countries like Malawi, where about 30 percent of the population does not have easy access to clean drinking water and nearly 60 percent lack sanitary toilet facilities, [according to UNICEF](#).

Since the outbreak began, Malawi has deployed water tankers to areas without piped water. Officials are reconnecting water taps in rural areas, including those behind on payments, and providing chlorine to families for cleaning water.

There are also continuing efforts to administer the cholera vaccine, a small tube of liquid ingested by mouth. But some communities have chased away health workers, accusing them of trying to trick people into taking the Covid-19 vaccine, said Chisomo Kankhwali, who works in the Lilongwe district health office. From the start of the pandemic, conspiracy theories about Covid have been rife in Malawi, some of them spread by religious leaders.

“They accuse us of simply making the Covid vaccine an oral vaccine,” Mr. Kankhwali said.

In 2015, Malawi started a broad effort to eradicate cholera, working with traditional leaders to build latrines, hand-washing facilities and other infrastructure in vulnerable regions — an effort to stop defecation in open areas like streams and lakes. In all, 155 out of 293 traditional communities were certified as free of open defecation, said Dr. Mwansambo, the health official.

Then in 2017, Malawi began administering more than three million cholera vaccines. Case numbers plummeted from 1,792 in 2016 to the single digits five years later.

But heavy rains and floods last year, caused by Tropical Storm Ana and Cyclone Gombe, destroyed latrines and hand-washing facilities in some communities, Dr. Mwansambo said. He added that a rise in illegal mining along Lake Malawi also contributed to the outbreak. The miners create informal settlements, using the lake for washing and as a toilet, he said.

Some said the economic hardship of the pandemic exacerbated conditions. More people have gone hungry, which can weaken the immune system, said John Phuka, an associate professor of health at Kamuzu University. Rapid growth in Malawi’s cities also led to new informal communities that rely on shallow wells for drinking water and do not have proper toilets, he said.

Andrew Azman, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins who specializes in cholera research, said waning immunity among Malawians may also be a factor. Not only did vaccination efforts slow after the 2017 campaign, but the low prevalence of the disease may have reduced natural immunity in communities, said Dr. Azman, who used to live and work in Malawi.

“One of the big lessons is that you can’t let off just because you don’t see cholera,” he said. “If it’s in the region, and you still have poor water and sanitation, you are at risk.”

As it sickens and kills, cholera is also undermining Malawi’s social fabric.

At the funeral for Nambewe Chisankha, a woman in her 50s who died of cholera at Bwaila this month, one of her village leaders told mourners that his fellow chiefs wanted “to warn everyone that there is a cholera outbreak that is dangerous and killing us.”

“This cholera is invented,” someone in the crowd howled.

Later, a gravedigger, who is considered one of the custodians of the community’s burial rituals, interrupted the chief — a remarkable show of defiance — and demanded to know why certain protocols, such as viewing the body and laying a wreath, had not been observed. The traditions had been omitted to prevent cholera’s spread.

Back at Bwaila the next day, the mood was less tense. More than two dozen women, gathering for a weekly prayer meeting that predated the outbreak, sang Christian hymns in a hospital ward. But on this day, as with many of the prayer circles in recent months, the focus was cholera.

“We have faith God will give us victory over cholera,” said Florence Chikapa, reaching her hands to the sky in a plea for divine intercession. “A big miracle awaits us.”

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| HEADLINE | 01/21 UK sets 3-day coronation weekend 6-8 May |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/21/world/europe/king-charles-coronation-britain.html |
| GIST | <p>LONDON — King Charles III has signaled that he wants a streamlined coronation ceremony. But that doesn't mean an economically straitened Britain won't throw an extravagant party as it crowns its first king in seven decades in May.</p> <p>Late Saturday, Buckingham Palace announced details of a three-day merrymaking jamboree that will rival Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee last June. Among the highlights: a star-studded concert at Windsor Castle, a nationwide series of street parties and a national volunteering campaign, branded "The Big Help Out."</p> <p>The sheer size of the festivities might seem surprising because the palace had earlier indicated that Charles wanted a scaled-back ceremony, as compared with his mother's, given the cost-of-living crisis afflicting the country. But the British government now views the coronation weekend as an opportunity to lift spirits after a hard winter, according to people familiar with the planning, and it has encouraged the royal family to pull out the stops.</p> <p>The palace is still expected to shorten the service, which will take place May 6 at Westminster Abbey and be conducted by the Most Rev. Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury. It will reduce the guest list and dispense with some of the more antiquated rituals of a ceremony that dates back nearly 1,000 years.</p> <p>But coronations allow the public, in Britain and across the world, a chance to take part in royal festivities. Elizabeth's coronation, in June 1953, was the first to be televised, drawing an estimated global audience of more than 250 million people.</p> <p>Many of the set pieces of that spectacle — a grand procession to the palace from the abbey, complete with golden carriage, and an appearance by the king and his family on the balcony — will remain. And with Britons getting a day off on Monday, May 8, in the new king's honor, the palace is laying on two extra days of festivities.</p> <p>"Their majesties the king and queen consort hope the coronation weekend will provide an opportunity to spend time and celebrate with friends, families and communities across the United Kingdom, the realms and the Commonwealth," the palace said in a statement issued on Saturday evening.</p> <p>The party begins on Sunday, May 7, when pop and rock stars will join a coronation choir at Windsor Castle for a televised concert. There is no word yet on who will perform, but if the queen's jubilee concert is any indication — it featured Alicia Keys, Duran Duran, Rod Stewart and Brian May, the guitarist from Queen — the lineup will be strong.</p> <p>In keeping with what the palace said was Charles's wish for a coronation that reflects the times, the choir will include people drawn from singing groups composed of deaf people, refugees and L.G.B.T.Q. people. The concert will culminate with a nationwide lighting display, using lasers and drones — a technology used to great effect last spring with images of the queen and her handbag floating above Buckingham Palace.</p> <p>The series of street parties, nicknamed "The Coronation Big Lunch," is also borrowed from the Platinum Jubilee, with the palace planning for thousands of gatherings in streets, gardens and parks across Britain. This will be a showcase for the queen consort, Camilla, who has been patron of a charity that organizes public lunches for people living alone.</p> <p>That Monday, when many Britons will take advantage of a one-off May 8 holiday, the palace hopes that some will undertake volunteer work. Charles, as Prince of Wales, emphasized volunteer service through his charities and views that as a major legacy of his coronation, according to the palace.</p> <p>The palace has left some important questions about the coronation unanswered, not least whether the king's younger son, Prince Harry, and his wife, Meghan, will be invited. Harry's best-selling memoir,</p> |

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| | <p>“Spare,” has deepened the rift between him and his father and brother, Prince William — claiming, among other things, that he and Meghan were mistreated by Charles and William.</p> <p>The palace has steadfastly refused to respond to the accusations, and it is not expected to address the issue of inviting Harry and Meghan for a while. May 6 will be the fourth birthday of the couple’s son, Archie, which could affect the travel plans of Meghan, if not of his father. In an interview with ITV to promote his book, Harry was noncommittal about making the trip from his home in Southern California.</p> <p>“There’s a lot that can happen between now and then,” he said.</p> |
| | <p>Return to Top</p> |

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Canada settles ‘cultural genocide’ for \$2B |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/21/canada-indigenous-settlement.html |
| GIST | <p>OTTAWA — Canada said on Saturday that it had agreed to pay 2.8 billion Canadian dollars, about \$2 billion, to settle the latest in a series of lawsuits seeking reparations for the harm done to Indigenous people through a system of mandatory residential schools that a national commission called “cultural genocide.”</p> <p>The new settlement, which must still be approved by a court, resolves a class action brought in 2012 by 325 First Nations that sought compensation for the erosion of their cultures and languages.</p> <p>Thousands of Indigenous students educated at about 130 residential schools from the 19th century through the 1990s were forbidden, sometimes through coercive violence, from speaking their ancestral languages and practicing their traditions.</p> <p>Indigenous children were sometimes taken from their families by force and sent to the schools, which were largely run by churches.</p> <p>In 2021, Canadians were shocked by evidence of unmarked graves containing the remains of 215 former students on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. Evidence of the graves was discovered using ground penetrating radar. Subsequent searches at other onetime schools have found similar possible burial sites. Thousands of students are believed to have died at the schools from disease, malnutrition, neglect, accidents, fires and violence.</p> <p>If the new agreement is approved, it will be the fifth major legal settlement related to the schools since a 2006 agreement provided compensation to former students and established a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The commission examined the educational system, heard testimony from former students and issued a long list of recommendations that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised to fully implement. With the latest agreement, the government will have provided a total of about 10 billion Canadian dollars in restitution.</p> <p>“The residential school settlement left a lot of unfinished business,” Marc Miller, the Indigenous relations minister, said in an interview referring to the 2006 agreement. “One part of that was the very legitimate argument by the plaintiff was that there was a collective type of damage to language, culture and heritage and that devastation that was caused by successive government policies.”</p> <p>The Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, which announced the discovery of the likely remains at the Kamloops Indian Residential School site in 2021, was among the parties to the current lawsuit.</p> <p>“Canada spent over 100 years trying to destroy our languages and cultures through residential schools,” Kúkpi7, or Chief, Rosanne Casimir of Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc said in a statement. “It is going to take incredible efforts by our nations to restore our languages and culture — this settlement gives nations the resources and tools needed to make a good start.”</p> |

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| | <p>Under the agreement, the government will place the settlement into a trust fund that Indigenous communities can use for educational, cultural and language programs. It will also be used to develop projects to support former students and help them in “reconnecting with their heritage,” the government said in a statement.</p> <p>The full agreement will be released later. The Federal Court of Canada is scheduled to hold a hearing in late February, where it is expected to approve the settlement.</p> <p>While the government settled part of the lawsuit in 2021, the main part of the case had been scheduled to go to trial. Mr. Miller, the Indigenous relations minister, said the government decided last fall, however, that it was better to negotiate a settlement than go to court and have the arguments play out in an “adversarial surrounding.”</p> <p>“Get around the table, figure out how we move forward and figure out how we put in place financial resources,” he said of the federal cabinet’s thinking behind the decision. “Not that they can completely replace the harm that was done — far from it.”</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 China girds for Lunar New Year travel |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/21/world/asia/china-lunar-new-year-travel-covid.html |
| GIST | <p>Sheng Chun had not visited his parents in their mountain village in southern China for more than three years because China’s “zero Covid” restrictions made travel difficult. Then the country abandoned its stringent pandemic rules, and he decided to take a long-anticipated road trip.</p> <p>With his son and wife, Mr. Sheng, 43, embarked on a two-week journey from Beijing that would cover more than 1,000 miles, through cultural spots like a Ming dynasty village and temples, then finally home for the Lunar New Year. He hoped to later drive his parents back to Beijing.</p> <p>“I want them to go out and have more fun,” he said. “They’re in their 70s now, and for a while I was too busy working. I feel guilty that I didn’t really spend time with them.”</p> <p>When the coronavirus spread widely out of the central Chinese city of Wuhan in early 2020, local and provincial governments moved quickly to lock down tens of millions of people. The past few Lunar New Years have been muted affairs, with many deterred from traveling by fear of the virus or by lockdowns, quarantines or other onerous rules.</p> <p>This year, the most important holiday on China’s calendar has a different feel. It comes just weeks after the government, facing economic pressure and widespread public discontent, lifted its stringent Covid-19 restrictions. For many people, the joy of finally seeing far-flung loved ones without the risk of getting caught in a lockdown is laced with anxiety — in particular, the fear of spreading the virus to older relatives in rural communities unequipped medically to handle it.</p> <p>Hundreds of millions of people have been on the move, packing into train stations and bus terminals with overstuffed suitcases and bags full of gifts as they made their way home.</p> <p>That travel rush — in pre-Covid times, typically the world’s largest annual migration — used to be a source of public complaints. But on social media, people celebrated this year’s congestion as a sign of a return to normal, or at least a new normal.</p> <p>Even as the virus has continued to spread around the country, many welcomed that new phase. They pointed to announcements by some provincial and local governments that the current wave of cases in some cities had peaked as a sign that for now, the worst may have passed. It was time to think about something other than Covid — like multigenerational reunions, complete with feasting and fireworks. For some people, it was time for that awkward moment of introducing a new love interest to their families.</p> |

Wang Yanjie, 30, a product manager in Shanghai, had hoped to bring her boyfriend of two years to her home village in central China but was thwarted twice: first by [a two-month lockdown](#) in spring 2022, and later, by a coronavirus outbreak in her home province in November.

Finally, Ms. Wang and her boyfriend took an early train to the northwestern city of Bozhou from Shanghai's Hongqiao station, then car-pooled with other residents to her hometown near Zhoukou in Henan Province. On the first night, she watched nervously as her parents and boyfriend chatted over handmade noodles, steamed vegetables and chicken feet. Then, in a sign of approval, they asked when they could meet his parents.

"It went quite well," said Ms. Wang, relieved. "They thought my boyfriend was handsome, earnest and well-mannered."

China expects traffic over the holiday to nearly double compared with the prior year, exceeding [two billion passenger trips](#) in the 40-day period starting in early January. And while the formal rules on travel have relaxed, the admonitory official language is unchanged.

At a [news conference](#) on Monday, Li Yanming, a department head at the Beijing Hospital, warned of rising cases and urged citizens to take precautions. The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention [issued a notice](#) discouraging long-distance travel for those still recovering from the latest wave of coronavirus outbreaks. In early January, China's transportation ministry [urged symptomatic travelers](#) to avoid travel and large gatherings.

"This year, Lunar New Year travel peak coincides with the peak wave of the virus," Xu Chengguang, the vice minister of transport, told state news media. "It's the most challenging spring festival in recent years."

Much of that challenge will unfold in China's countryside, [where a surge in cases](#) partly set off by migrant workers returning to their home villages could hobble China's sparse network of underresourced rural health care systems.

In mid-December, a coronavirus wave that ripped through the city of Jinzhong, in Shanxi Province, overstretched its hospitals. Long lines formed outside smaller village clinics, and medical equipment like beds and ventilators ran short. Dr. Guo Xiaohong, a physician at a clinic in the city, said that many had recovered since then, and that visits to her clinic had declined by half. But the New Year travel rush holds with it the possibility of similar episodes elsewhere — or even again in Jinzhong.

"Experts say the population has achieved herd immunity, but how much resistance does this immunity produce against the mutation of the virus?" said Dr. Guo, who has also urged people not to travel far or even to visit relatives during the Lunar New Year.

Concerns over another rural outbreak also lingered in the mind of Liu Han, a villager who had recently returned to Xiangtan, 700 miles south of Jinzhong. His family, along with the rest of the village, caught the virus from workers at a nearby factory for betel nuts, a local Hunan delicacy.

"We've been closed down for so long — three years — you develop some habits, right? I've been locked down to the point of fear now. I'm scared of it," he said, referring to the virus.

Mr. Liu also saw the toll Covid had taken on the village, which was made up mostly of older people. Main thoroughfares were quiet, and supermarkets and pharmacy shelves had been emptied by people stocking up. His father, a restaurant owner, had temporarily closed his restaurant because of illness among the staff. Four villagers in their 70s and 90s had died in recent weeks, Mr. Liu said, adding that he did not dare to speculate on the cause.

Now, as friends and relatives arrive home for the holiday, Mr. Liu remains uneasy. "It's precisely because we've opened up that I feel so tense," he said.

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| | <p>This Lunar New Year comes at the same time as the third anniversary of the lockdowns in Wuhan, a coincidence virtually impossible for many Chinese to ignore.</p> <p>“Wuhan has made such a big sacrifice; no one should forget it, at least I won’t,” said Song Fei, 19, a college student in Kunming, in southern China. Wuhan was a “heroic” city, she said, one in which people paid a high price for publicizing the truth about the pandemic.</p> <p>Last weekend, with around three-quarters of his road trip back home completed, Mr. Sheng arrived in the city where the pandemic first emerged. There were few reminders left of that time, he said, except for roadside propaganda slogans lauding the heroism of Wuhan’s residents at the height of the pandemic.</p> <p>The atmosphere of panic that gripped the city in 2020 “had disappeared,” Mr. Sheng said. “Everyone’s lives have returned to normal.”</p> <p>At a temple, Mr. Sheng joined a crowd of Wuhan residents lighting incense at the alter, praying for good fortune in the coming year.</p> <p>“Of the last three years, I think this year will be the best,” he said.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Timeline of Biden classified documents |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/12/us/politics/biden-documents-timeline.html |
| GIST | <p>Details continue to emerge regarding the discovery of classified documents from the Obama administration that had been improperly stored in locations associated with President Biden.</p> <p>Here is what we know about how events unfolded, based on statements from Attorney General Merrick B. Garland, the White House and Mr. Biden’s personal lawyer:</p> <p>Nov. 2: Mr. Biden’s lawyers discovered a “small number” of classified documents in what the White House has described as a locked closet for an office Mr. Biden had used at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, a think tank in Washington. The administration said it reported this discovery to the National Archives that day.</p> <p>Nov. 3: The National Archives retrieved the materials from the closet, according to the administration.</p> <p>Nov. 4: Archives officials referred the matter to the Justice Department.</p> <p>Nov. 10: The Justice Department informed Mr. Biden’s legal team that it had begun a preliminary inquiry into what happened, according to a timeline released by one of Mr. Biden’s lawyers.</p> <p>Nov. 14: Mr. Garland selected John R. Lausch Jr., the U.S. attorney in Chicago, to conduct a preliminary assessment of the material to determine whether a special counsel was needed.</p> <p>Dec. 20: Mr. Biden’s lawyers told Mr. Lausch that they had found a second set of classified documents in the garage of his house in Wilmington, Del., according to Mr. Garland. The administration separately said it “immediately” notified the Justice Department upon finding a “small number” of such files in a storage space in the garage.</p> <p>Jan. 5: Mr. Lausch told Mr. Garland that a special counsel was warranted.</p> <p>Jan. 9: CBS News reported on the existence of the documents found at the Penn Biden Center. The White House acknowledged the matter in a statement but made no reference to the documents found at the president’s home in Wilmington.</p> |

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| | <p>Jan. 10: Mr. Biden told reporters in Mexico City that he was “surprised” to learn in the fall that classified documents had been taken to his former office at the think tank, but he did not disclose that more documents had been found.</p> <p>Jan. 11: NBC News reported that a second batch of classified records had been found, but without details like when and where. It would later become clear this was the batch found in the garage on Dec. 20. Mr. Biden’s aides searched his houses in Wilmington and Rehoboth Beach, Del., for any additional records, according to a timeline shared by one of Mr. Biden’s lawyers.</p> <p>Jan. 12: The White House publicly acknowledged that documents had been found in Mr. Biden’s garage, along with one additional page with classified information that had been “discovered among stored materials in an adjacent room.” A search of the Biden home in Rehoboth Beach, Del., did not uncover any documents, the administration said. Mr. Garland announced he was appointing Robert K. Hur as special counsel to investigate.</p> <p>Jan. 14: The White House issued a statement that five more pages of classified information had been discovered in the storage room adjacent to Mr. Biden’s garage hours after its statement on Jan. 12.</p> <p>Jan. 21: Mr. Biden’s personal lawyer said in a statement that Justice Department investigators had seized more than half a dozen additional documents, some of which were classified, in a search of the president’s home in Wilmington, Del., on Jan. 20.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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| HEADLINE | 01/21 More classified documents at Biden’s home |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/21/us/politics/biden-documents.html |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — Investigators for the Justice Department on Friday seized more than a half-dozen documents, some of them classified, at President Biden’s residence in Wilmington, Del., after conducting a 13-hour search of the home, the president’s personal lawyer said Saturday evening.</p> <p>The remarkable search of a sitting president’s home by federal agents — at the invitation of Mr. Biden’s lawyers — dramatically escalated the legal and political situation for the president, the latest in a series of discoveries that has already led to a special counsel investigation.</p> <p>During Friday’s search, six more items with classified markings — including some documents from his time as a senator and others from his time as vice president — were taken by investigators, along with surrounding materials, according to the statement from Bob Bauer, Mr. Biden’s attorney.</p> <p>Mr. Bauer did not indicate what had prompted the search, saying only that the president’s lawyers had offered to provide access for a search “in the interest of moving the process forward as expeditiously as possible.” Justice Department investigators coordinated the search with Mr. Biden’s lawyers in advance, Mr. Bauer said, and the president’s personal and White House lawyers were present at the time.</p> <p>“The F.B.I. on Friday executed a planned, consensual search of the president’s residence in Wilmington,” said Joseph D. Fitzpatrick, an assistant U.S. attorney in Illinois who is serving as a spokesman for the special counsel investigating the Biden documents case.</p> <p>The search agreement with Mr. Biden’s legal team was negotiated by John R. Lausch, a federal prosecutor picked to lead the initial inquiry last year. His replacement, Robert K. Hur, who was appointed to serve as the permanent special counsel in the case earlier this month, is expected to take over “shortly,” Mr. Fitzpatrick said.</p> <p>Mr. Bauer said the Justice Department had requested that the search not be made public before it was conducted, “in accordance with its standard procedures, and we agreed to cooperate.” He did not provide any more detail about the nature of the documents that were taken or what level of classification had been stamped on them.</p> |

The search underscored the seriousness of the investigation into Mr. Biden's handling of documents and, while not a surprise raid, in some ways resembled the extensive search of former President Donald J. Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida last summer, with agents looking for classified documents they believed were in Mr. Trump's possession.

Mr. Biden and his aides have repeatedly argued that the two cases are very different because the president has cooperated fully with authorities, while Mr. Trump and his lawyers resisted efforts by the National Archives and the Justice Department to return documents.

Mr. Trump — who at one point claimed that he had declassified all the documents in question just by thinking about doing so — and his advisers are also under investigation for obstructing the inquiry into the classified information.

But since the discovery of Mr. Biden's documents, Mr. Trump has complained that Justice Department investigators were treating his successor differently.

"When is the F.B.I. going to raid the many homes of Joe Biden, perhaps even the White House?" Mr. Trump wrote in a statement on his social media site earlier this month.

The results of Friday's search follow a series of discoveries by the president's own lawyers of classified documents at the president's Wilmington home and the Washington office Mr. Biden used before moving into the White House. The lawyers quickly turned the documents over to the National Archives and, later, to the Justice Department.

Mr. Biden did not reveal the discovery of some of those documents for nearly two months, after initially finding them on Nov. 2. He has said that it would eventually be revealed that he did nothing wrong.

"There is no there there," Mr. Biden told reporters on Thursday evening during a trip to California.

Regarding Friday's search, Mr. Bauer said in his statement on Saturday: "Yesterday, D.O.J. completed a thorough search of all the materials in the president's Wilmington home. It began at approximately 9:45 a.m. and concluded at around 10:30 p.m. and covered all working, living and storage spaces in the home."

"D.O.J. had full access to the president's home, including personally handwritten notes, files, papers, binders, memorabilia, to-do lists, schedules, and reminders going back decades," he added, referring to the Justice Department.

Mr. Bauer did not make clear in his statement where in the Wilmington home the documents had been found. The previous classified documents were found in the home's garage and in a nearby storage space.

Another statement, from Richard Sauber, a member of the White House Counsel's Office, said that the search had been conducted and finished at the home on Friday, and neither the president nor Jill Biden, the first lady, was at the residence at the time.

On Friday evening, even as investigators were still going through his home, Mr. Biden traveled to Rehoboth Beach, where he owns another house, to spend the weekend there. The president's lawyers have said they searched the Rehoboth Beach home earlier this month and found no relevant documents. Officials have not said whether Justice Department investigators plan to conduct another search of the property.

In his statement on Saturday, Mr. Bauer said that the president's cooperation with investigators was evidence that Mr. Biden and the White House were acting in good faith.

“We have attempted to balance the importance of public transparency where appropriate with the established norms and limitations necessary to protect the investigation’s integrity,” he wrote. “We will continue to do so throughout the course of our cooperation with D.O.J.”

News of the lengthy search, and the discovery of more classified materials, is certain to provide new ammunition to the president’s critics, including Republican members of the House, who have already demanded information about the documents and their potential impact on national security.

In a letter to Ron Klain, the White House chief of staff, this past week, Representative James R. Comer, Republican of Kentucky, demanded that the president and his lawyers provide more information to Congress.

“It is troubling that classified documents have been improperly stored at the home of President Biden for at least six years, raising questions about who may have reviewed or had access to classified information,” Mr. Comer wrote.

On Saturday, after news of the latest discovery was reported, Mr. Comer tweeted: “Biden’s White House claimed all classified documents were turned over. Now the Justice Department found more. Is the scavenger hunt over? Americans need answers now.”

Mr. Comer, the chairman of the House Oversight Committee, has not demanded similar transparency from Mr. Trump regarding the classified documents found at his home.

Friday’s search underscored the unprecedented nature of the twin investigations being conducted by separate special counsels — one of the sitting president and one of his immediate predecessor — for improper handling of highly sensitive government documents.

A spokeswoman for Attorney General Merrick B. Garland declined to comment when asked if he had been consulted in advance about the search. She referred all questions to a spokesman for Mr. Hur, the special counsel.

Special counsels have broad autonomy to search locations associated with an investigation, or even seek search warrants, without seeking permission to undertake major investigative steps. Under departmental regulations, an attorney general could block a move, but only if the counsel’s behavior was “inappropriate” or grossly misguided.

Nonetheless, Mr. Garland would almost certainly have been informed about a consensual search through a departmental procedure known as an “urgent report” intended to keep leadership informed of the progress of the probe, said Mary McCord, a former top official in the Justice Department’s national security division.

“In this case, it seems that all along there has been an intent to cooperate with the investigation, that much is clear,” said Ms. McCord, a law professor at Georgetown’s law school. “What we still don’t have is an explanation of how this material, some of which dates back to his days in the Senate, ended up there.”

Mr. Biden’s possession of classified documents was first revealed to the public earlier this month, by CBS News.

Since then, the president’s aides have struggled to contend with a series of rolling disclosures of additional document discoveries and legal developments that have raised the scrutiny on Mr. Biden’s handling of the sensitive material.

Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary, has been pressed repeatedly by reporters about the developing story during her daily press briefing. At one point, she told journalists that neither she nor her staff had been involved in discussions about what to tell the public and when.

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| HEADLINE | 01/20 Seattle Convention Center Summit opening |
| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/upcoming-seattle-convention-center-sparks-hope-for-future-as-more-stores-close-downtown |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE - As more big businesses are set to close in downtown Seattle and tech companies see a flurry of layoffs, city officials are hoping the Seattle Convention Center's big expansion will drive some positive change.</p> <p>The expansion at the Seattle Convention Center is set to open on Jan. 25.</p> <p>Still, even with new doors opening, many said they are saddened to see their favorite doors closing downtown. Friday marked the last day Nike was open for business downtown.</p> <p>"I've been coming for about a decade, so it's served its purpose," said Richard Green, a loyal customer. "I've been that consistent. And it suddenly doesn't surprise me, it surpassed the tests of time. It's its time."</p> <p>Nike's closure also follows that of the Regal Meridian movie theater and one of Amazon's downtown offices. Google's parent company also announced on Friday that it would be cutting thousands of jobs.</p> <p>With businesses leaving downtown, some store owners said they worry that it's a sign of the times.</p> <p>"We really need to bring better use into downtown," said Olga Sagan, owner of Piroshky Piroshky. "The city of Seattle needs to bring people into downtown, needs to demand for people to come back. The county needs to demand for people to come back so we can have businesses coming back."</p> <p>A comeback is exactly what's in store, according to Downtown Seattle Association. Though some doors are closing, association director James Sido said several others are opening.</p> <p>"We are excited about several newcomers who have opened their doors in recent months, with more on the way. To help foster their success we need to ensure a safe and welcoming environment, something that's been improving in downtown and is top of mind for our city leaders," said Sido.</p> <p>A shining example of what's to come is the new Seattle Convention Center Summit. The goal is to bring in new tourists and their money to the city.</p> <p>"I'm really optimistic that Seattle will continue to get better and the downtown core will continue to be thriving. And once that happens, downtown visitors will want to go where the locals go. And as much as we can do that and offer those opportunities to out-of-town guests, we have repeat business. And you can't do any better than having repeat business," said Jeff Blosser, president and CEO of Seattle Convention Center.</p> <p>The convention center will also offer employment opportunity downtown. Construction alone supplied about 6,000 jobs.</p> <p>"We will offer another 2,500 to 2,600 jobs in our industry just because of the business coming into the convention center in addition to the 3,500 that the arch is already supporting," said Blosser.</p> <p>Support is what the hospitality industry needs right now. Anne Johnson, the general manager of the nearby Kimpton Palladian Hotel, said the opening of the convention center feels like an important part of the renaissance of downtown.</p> <p>"It's just so exciting to be talking positively about Seattle again, about bringing on new staff, bringing on new people into the hotel into the restaurants. It's just, it's relief," said Johnson. "We haven't had this kind of excitement in this area for a few years now."</p> |

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| | <p>A relief downtown is what Mayor Bruce Harrell said the city has been aggressively working toward. He recently described the area's revitalization plan in one word: 'activation.'</p> <p>"So, we want to see how we can use the built-in environment to have people use culture and arts and music. We want to see people having coffee. We want the officers out of the cars walking around. We want to encourage the retail stores to find a use for them. So, we're talking to business owners about what we can do if a building is vacant," said Harrell.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Protests push back Lynnwood opioid center |
| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/opening-for-opioid-clinic-in-lynnwood-delayed-as-protest-against-it-continue |
| GIST | <p>LYNNWOOD, Wash. - Outraged residents continue to push back the opening of a proposed opioid treatment center in Lynnwood.</p> <p>The clinic, located just off 24th Avenue, was set to open on Jan. 23, but has since been delayed to Monday, Jan. 30.</p> <p>Mayor Christine Frizzell sent a letter to the Department of Health, lawmakers and Governor Jay Inslee notifying them of the ongoing issues, and what she says is a lack of transparency.</p> <p>She says \$300,000 have been invested in the proposed clinic with the promise of helping hundreds of people who have been waiting for treatment in Snohomish County.</p> <p>"We need an opioid treatment facility, we need drug rehabilitation centers but not right next to childcare," Frizzell said.</p> <p>Acadia Healthcare previously told FOX 13 they have about 100 patients living within five miles of what could be an opioid treatment center.</p> <p>Mayor Frizzell says she agrees the need is there in Snohomish County, but like many, she only found out about the clinic through a local newspaper on Dec. 13.</p> <p>"I kind of went ballistic," Frizzell said.</p> <p>So, she started digging.</p> <p>She says Acadia reached out to their planning and zoning department in March 2022 – inquiring about the location, but they didn't find anything prohibiting them.</p> <p>They filed for permits in June, and had to adhere to the Department of Health's requirements; notifying both city and county councils and outreach in the community.</p> <p>She says in October, Acadia filed a 14-page application with only two pages filled out to the Department of Health.</p> <p>"That's what was emailed to our city council and county council according to the RCW [Revised Code of Washington] they don't have to notify the city," Frizzell said.</p> <p>She says planning and zoning did everything right.</p> <p>"They could've overreached and done something different though," Frizzell said. "The authority lies with the department of health – the Washington department of health got the application, and they moved it forward into a public hearing that was between Christmas and New Years."</p> <p>Residents like Rachel Zhang, who lives a minute down the road on 24th Ave, are outraged.</p> |

"I was like are you kidding me?!" Zhang said. "Wrong, wrong, wrong on so many levels, it felt like a game they're playing."

"I lay all of this responsibility on those two bodies, Acadia and the Department of Health," Frizzel said. "How can DOH have gotten an application that barely had any information on it and schedule a public hearing?"

The mayor claims an Acadia representative directly lied to her about their outreach to Sgt. Carter with Lynnwood Police.

"She says I reached out to him, and he and I talked about the process and talked about what outcomes could be and who could benefit from a facility like this," Frizzel said. "I asked, 'Did you really talk with Sgt. Carter?' She says 'Oh yes, we had a very good conversation' and I said, 'I don't believe you because Sgt. Carter is a woman'."

Her goal in writing to the DOH, is changing the RCW to allow cities to have a say in the process and to hopefully relocate the clinic.

"I think that if Acadia had done their homework, like they should've done, they would have found that's not a great spot to site an opioid treatment facility. I think there are other places in Lynnwood, in South Snohomish County that are much better suited," Frizzel said.

Residents are having difficult conversations, moving and selling their homes. Others, like Zhang, are switching dentists, trying to find other areas to shop and take their child to daycare to avoid the clinic.

"I'm grateful the Lynnwood City is on our side," Zhang said. "I'm still very much worried and who knows if this is just going to be back and forth. Maybe Acadia will do something that will check all the boxes."

She says getting people the help they need is crucial, but her fear and concerns are the children in the area.

"No matter how good the intent is, there are unintended consequences," Frizzell said.

Others like Laura Warnock and Anthony Verduco have mixed emotions.

"I think that's amazing they're doing that, it's nice that there's going to be help," Warnock said.

She has a friend who is recovering from addiction and needs a clinic like this.

"Probably not right here, but it like in general, it could be good," Verduco said.

Safe Lynnwood says their concern is also about access to transportation, and the lack of parking as treatment facilities tend to be busy.

"We want to make it clear that our coalition supports treatment centers, just not at the expense of the safety of our children and community. Our concern is the potential impact on the safety of the kids who will be playing baseball less than 200 feet away, as well as the potential increase in crime, homelessness, and traffic congestion in an area without adequate parking and local infrastructure support."

"It's just not the right location," Zhang said.

We reached out to Acadia, who sent us this statement saying in part:

"We have dutifully followed the process to build this location on a parcel that was zoned for this use. We are working with all necessary agencies for their approvals. We understand the stigma associated with the

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| | <p>facility. We look forward to working with the community and residents to aid in their understanding of how this facility will operate and alleviate their concerns."</p> <p>However, as of publishing, the DOH has yet to make a decision on their licensing, FOX 13 reached out and are waiting to hear back.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Spokane I-90 homeless camp shrinks |
| SOURCE | https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/camp-hope-has-less-than-150-residents-spokane-washington-homeless/293-84b6b672-f832-4be9-8534-29ae8b024485 |
| GIST | <p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The homeless camp located near I-90 and Freya Street has an estimate of 138 people, 98 tents/structures, 20 RVs, 4 vehicles and 8 sites tagged for removal.</p> <p>According to the Washington State Department of Transportation, the site is continuing to shrink compared to the 467-person count the I-90 homeless encampment had in the fall.</p> <p>Some residents have moved off-site or found other lodging options. Outreach groups will help people struggling to move find options among available housing.</p> <p>"They have higher barriers and different needs than most, a lot of disabled folks here. Disabilities in shelters are really hard to navigate," said Julie Garcia, Executive Director of Jewels Helping Hands.</p> <p>As of Jan. 9, 51 people had moved from the encampment, commonly referred to as Camp Hope, and into Catalyst emergency housing facility. People who moved from the I-90 homeless encampment to Catalyst receive case management, employment and behavioral health services.</p> <p>Residents are receiving employment training programs and information on how to be set up for success as they leave the camp.</p> <p>"This is a lot different, I can see us not being here for much longer," said Jared Fullen, who resides at the homeless encampment. "But we're walking in a positive direction, we're all sticking to our guns, and all trying to get housing like we wanted to."</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Home sales tumble slowest pace in decade |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/us-united-states-housing-market-real-estate-sold-pending-listing-national-association-realtor-mortgage-rate-homeownership-america-treasury-pandemic-frenzy# |
| GIST | <p>LOS ANGELES — U.S. home sales tumbled to the slowest pace in nearly a decade as soaring mortgage rates and sky high prices in 2022 pushed homeownership out of reach for many Americans.</p> <p>The National Association of Realtors said Friday that existing U.S. home sales totaled 5.03 million last year, a 17.8% decline from 2021. That is the weakest year for home sales since 2014 and the biggest annual decline since 2008, during the housing crisis of the late 2000s.</p> <p>The median national home price for all of last year jumped 10.2% to \$386,300, the NAR said, and it's up 42% from 2019, before ultra-low mortgage rates and pandemic-fueled demand sent the market into a frenzy. That translates to a median \$114,000 increase in housing wealth in three years.</p> <p>"So, homeowners have done well during this housing (market) from 2019 through Covid until now," said Lawrence Yun, the NAR's chief economist. "The one big negative for home sales is home prices, which have risen dramatically, much faster than peoples' income."</p> <p>Mortgage rates more than doubled in 2022, climbing to a two-decade high of 7.08% in the fall as the Federal Reserve continued to boost its key lending rate in a quest to cool the economy and tame inflation.</p> |

Home sales slowed from a torrid pace at the start of the year as the surge in borrowing costs limited home hunters' buying power.

As rates rise, they can add hundreds of dollars to monthly mortgage payments. That can discourage homeowners who locked in a far lower rate the last couple of years from buying a new home, and price out many would-be buyers. In 2022, first-time buyers accounted for only 26% of all home sales, the NAR said.

The average rate on a 30-year mortgage rate fell this week to 6.15%, its lowest level since September, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac. Still, it remains nearly double the 3.56% average rate a year ago.

Mortgage rates are likely to remain a significant hurdle with the Federal Reserve consistently signaling its intent to keep raising short-term rates. While inflation has begun to slow, some Fed officials maintain that the central bank needs to keep hiking rates to make sure its job is done.

While mortgage rates don't necessarily mirror the Fed's rate increases, they tend to track the yield on the 10-year Treasury note. The yield is influenced by a variety of factors, including expectations for future inflation and global demand for U.S. Treasuries.

Existing home sales fell in December for the 11th month in a row to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.02 million, the NAR said. That's slightly better than what economists were expecting, according to FactSet.

December's sales sank 34% from a year earlier. Excluding the steep slowdown in sales that occurred in May 2020 near the start of the pandemic, sales last month skidded to the slowest annual pace since November 2010.

"Mortgage rates have fallen in the recent past weeks, so I'm very hopeful that the worst in home sales (is) probably coming to an end," Yun said. "Maybe this latest monthly figure will be the cyclical low point."

Despite the slowdown, home prices continued to rise last month, albeit at a slower pace than earlier in the year. The national median home sales price rose 2.3% in December from a year earlier to \$366,900, the NAR said.

Even if prices do stabilize, there are a stubbornly low number of homes on the market. The inventory of homes for sale fell for the fifth consecutive month in December, to 970,000 homes. That's down 13.4% from the previous month, but up 10.2% from December 2021, and amounts to a 2.9-month supply at the current sales pace, the NAR said. In a more balanced market between buyers and sellers, there is a 5- to 6-month supply.

Homebuyers should have more to choose from in the spring when inventory traditionally picks up.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Health officials investigate measles case |
| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/public-health-seattle-king-county-investigating-confirmed-measles-case/4W5Y3JYV4VFMNPWJTRNZZQULP4/ |
| GIST | <p>Public Health — Seattle & King County is investigating a confirmed case of measles in an adult woman who was recently at Sea-Tac Airport and Providence Swedish First Hill hospital in Seattle, the agency announced Friday.</p> <p>PHSKC said the woman was at both sites while infectious and while she was unvaccinated. She was reportedly at Sea-Tac Airport on Wednesday from 12:26 p.m. to 3 p.m. in areas from the South Satellite (Gate B6) to Baggage Claim (Carousel 04).</p> |

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| | <p>The woman was at the Providence Swedish First Hill Emergency Department at 700 Minor Ave. on Friday from 2 p.m. to 4:55 p.m., PHSKC said.</p> <p>“Measles is highly contagious and if you don’t have immunity, you can get it just by being in a room where a person with measles has been,” said Dr. Eric Chow, Communicable Disease Chief for PHSKC.</p> <p>PHSKC said the risk to the general public is low since most people in the area have immunity to measles through vaccination; however, if you were in a location of potential exposure, the agency recommends you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if you’ve been vaccinated against measles or have had measles in the past, and make sure you’re up-to-date on your vaccinations. • Call a healthcare provider if you develop an illness with fever or with an unexplained rash. <p>The agency said if you were at one of the locations at the times listed and are not immune to measles, symptoms would likely arise between Wednesday, Jan. 25 and Friday, Feb. 10.</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Google pulls out of Kirkland campus project |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/money/economy/google-downtown-kirkland-location-purchase/281-4dd8a833-fb8e-4e83-b18d-6fbf30cfa25 |
| GIST | <p>KIRKLAND, Wash. — The City of Kirkland announced Friday that Google will not be buying the Lee Johnson properties and will not be proceeding with their redevelopment project.</p> <p>The proposed purchase was for a 10-acre lot located on Northeast 85th Street. The original plan would have allowed for 7,000 employees on the campus.</p> <p>In a press release, the city cited the completion of the Sound Transit Bus Rapid Transit Station will create "similar opportunities for redevelopment."</p> <p>The press release read, in part, "The City of Kirkland will continue to partner with the Lee Johnson family on any future projects that leverage this once-in-a-generation Sound Transit investment to accomplish the City’s Station Area Plan vision to build 'a thriving, new walkable district with high tech and family wage jobs, plentiful affordable housing, sustainable buildings, park amenities, and commercial and retail services linked by transit.'"</p> <p>According to the city, the Lee Johnson family will continue to operate the current car dealerships on the site in the meantime.</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 IAEA: Fukushima radioactive water release |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/iaea-says-fukushima-water-release-to-follow-safety-standards/ |
| GIST | <p>TOKYO (AP) — The head of a U.N. nuclear agency task force assessing the safety of Japan’s plan to release treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea said Friday that Japanese regulators have shown their commitment to comply with international safety standards.</p> <p>International concern over the plan has been widening. Last week, the head of the 18-nation Pacific Island Forum, which includes Australia, New Zealand and other island nations, expressed concern about any impact of radiation from the water on the livelihoods of people in the region which suffered in the past from atomic bomb tests, and urged Japan to suspend the plan.</p> <p>“The region is steadfast in its position that there should be no discharge until all parties verify through scientific means that such a discharge is safe,” forum Secretary General Henry Puna said at a public seminar on the Fukushima issue.</p> |

The U.S. National Association of Marine Laboratories, an organization of more than 100 laboratories, also expressed opposition to the plan, saying there was a lack of adequate and accurate scientific data supporting Japan's assertion of safety.

Gustavo Caruso, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency task force, said his team visited the damaged Fukushima Daiichi plant this week and witnessed the first of a series of inspections by the Japanese Nuclear Regulation Authority before it gives its final go-ahead for the release. He said officials from the authority addressed all questions raised by the task force and showed their commitment to following safety standards.

Japan's government said last week that the release is likely to begin sometime in the spring or summer and continue for decades.

Japanese regulators are responsible for examining whether preparations for the release by the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, are consistent with its approved implementation plan.

At the request of Japan, IAEA is reviewing whether the reparations for the discharge comply with international standards.

A massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011 destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi plant's cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt and release large amounts of radiation. Water used to cool the three damaged reactor cores, which remain highly radioactive, has leaked into the basements of the reactor buildings and has been collected, treated and stored in about 1,000 tanks that now cover much of the plant.

The government and TEPCO say the tanks must be removed so that facilities can be built for the plant's decommissioning. The tanks are expected to reach their capacity of 1.37 million tons later this year.

Most of the radioactivity is removed from the water during treatment, but tritium cannot be removed and low levels of some other radionuclides also remain. The government and TEPCO say the environmental and health impacts will be negligible because the water will be released gradually after further treatment and dilution by large amounts of seawater.

Some scientists say the impact of long-term, low-dose exposure to tritium and other radionuclides on the environment and humans is still unknown and the release should be delayed. They say tritium affects humans more when it is consumed in fish.

Local fishing communities have fiercely rejected the plan, saying their already badly hurt business will suffer again due to the negative image from the water release. Neighboring countries including China and South Korea have also raised concerns about potential health risks.

Caruso, who heads the IAEA's Department of Nuclear Safety and Security, said the task force will release a report on this week's mission within three months and make another visit to Japan in the second quarter of the year to meet with Japan's industry ministry, the safety authority and TEPCO "to finalize any outstanding questions" before compiling a comprehensive report.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Judge sanctions Seattle: missing city texts |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/judge-sanctions-city-of-seattle-for-destroying-evidence-in-chop-lawsuit-lets-claims-go-to-trial/ |
| GIST | A federal judge has levied crippling sanctions against the city of Seattle for deleting thousands of text messages between high-ranking officials, including the former mayor and police chief, during the three-week Capitol Hill Organized Protest — a ruling that will undermine the city's defense against a lawsuit filed by business owners and residents affected by the high-profile protests. |

In a pair of lengthy orders Jan. 13, U.S. District Judge Thomas Zilly sent the so-called Hunters Capital lawsuit to trial on two of five claims, dismissing three others. He also ordered the city to pay the attorneys fees for those who showed city leaders destroyed significant evidence about their decision-making during CHOP, including their move to abandon the Police Department's East Precinct.

The judge found significant evidence that the destruction of CHOP evidence was intentional and that officials tried for months to hide the text deletions from opposing attorneys.

"The Court finds substantial circumstantial evidence that the city acted with the requisite intent necessary to impose a severe sanction and that the city's conduct exceeds gross negligence," he wrote.

For that reason, Zilly said that when the case goes to trial he'll instruct the jury that it may presume the text messages were detrimental to the city's legal position and that there's significant circumstantial evidence they were deleted intentionally.

"City officials deleted thousands of texts messages from their city-owned phones in complete disregard of their legal obligation to preserve relevant evidence," Zilly wrote in the [39-page order](#). "Further, the city significantly delayed disclosing ... that thousands of text messages had been deleted" and could not be reproduced or recovered.

"As a result, substantial evidence has been destroyed by the city and is unavailable to plaintiffs to support their position in this litigation," the judge concluded.

The City Attorney's Office emphasized in a statement that the city prevailed on the three arguments Zilly dismissed but did not comment on the two that will go to trial.

The judge pointed out that the plaintiffs' attorney sent several letters to the mayor's office and other officials alerting them to the lawsuit, which was filed June 24, 2020, yet the city didn't issue an order telling officials to preserve relevant evidence, written and electronic, until July 22.

By then, the order states, former [Mayor Jenny Durkan, former police Chief Carmen Best, fire Chief Harold Scoggins and four other key city officials](#) at the time — Seattle Public Utilities official Idris Beauregard; assistant police Chief Eric Greening; SPD's chief strategy officer Chris Fischer; and Seattle Emergency Operations Center coordinator Kenneth Neafcy — had purged their phones of tens of thousands of text messages.

The former mayor has offered a number of explanations for the missing messages, including that she dropped her phone in water, that she inadvertently changed the phone's deletion settings and that "someone" set a new phone to delete messages older than 30 days, resulting in a rolling deletion of previous messages.

Zilly, in his order, found the former mayor's "[various reasons for deleting her text messages strain credibility.](#)"

Durkan, through a spokesperson, said Thursday that she "worked to keep the public informed through near-daily public meetings and press interviews."

"She and others believed that all phone data was automatically backed up by the city; when she learned that was not happening, she took action to ensure the information would be preserved," the spokesperson said.

The order notes that Best's phone at some point was also set to delete text messages after a month, despite her obligation to keep them due to pending litigation. Zilly noted that the former chief apparently deleted more than 27,000 of those text messages by hand.

The Seattle Times sued the city over the mayor's missing texts, settling the lawsuit for \$200,000 and a promise by the city to improve its public records process.

The city was able to re-create or recover about 161,000 of the text messages that had been sent to multiple individuals or copied to other officials, but the judge noted that key texts between Durkan, Best and Scoggins were lost forever.

"Although the city issued a significant number of litigation holds" requiring the preservation of all evidence pertinent to lawsuits that had been filed months earlier, "Officials at the highest levels of city government completely disregarded these holds and deleted thousands of relevant text messages," Zilly wrote.

Several such holds were issued beginning June 9, 2020, when the Seattle chapter of Black Lives Matter sued the city over allegations that police were using excessive force against protesters following the May 25 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, which prompted protests nationwide.

More than a dozen businesses, led by Seattle developer Hunters Capital, all located in and around the eight-block area that became known as CHOP, sued for damages on June 24, 2020. Their attorneys sent a series of letters to the city demanding that any evidence pertaining to the city's alleged support and encouragement of the zone's creation be retained, according to the court docket and pleadings.

Zilly concluded that officials ignored the notifications.

"Instead, Mayor Durkan, Chief Best, Chief Scoggins and other key city officials purged (through factory resets, changed retention settings, or manual deletions) thousands of CHOP-related text messages from their phones after they were under a clear legal obligation to preserve such information and without confirming that all of their text messages had been preserved through other means," the order says.

Moreover, Durkan learned in August 2020 that text messages had been deleted, but the city [did not disclose the deletions to opposing attorneys until March 2021](#).

Zilly's order also sanctioned Michael Malone of Hunters Capital for deleting text messages that should have been preserved — and ruled that the city's attorneys will be able to present that finding to the jury. Hunters Capital claims it lost \$2.9 million in business as a result of CHOP.

In his [second order](#), Zilly dismissed three of five claims against the city that were filed by the Hunters Capital plaintiffs, including allegations that the city violated their right to due process, allegations of negligence, and illegal taking of their property and civil rights.

However, Zilly concluded that the jury should hear evidence alleging the city "directly participated" in creating CHOP through its decision to provide portable toilets, hand-washing stations, dumpsters and other accommodations during the three-week protest.

And he said a jury should decide whether the city's actions amounted to a "right-of-access taking" by allowing the protesters to interfere with access to their businesses.

[Return to Top](#)

Cyber, Tech Awareness

[Top of page](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Hackers in L.A. school district earlier |
| SOURCE | https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-01-21/hackers-penetrated-l-a-unified-computer-systems-earlier-than-previously-disclosed |

An intrusion into the computer systems of the Los Angeles school district began more than a month earlier than [previously disclosed](#) and likely exposed confidential information, including Social Security numbers, of more than 500 people who worked for district contractors, according to information filed with the state.

As [the district previously disclosed](#), the security breach does not appear to extend to the payroll records and Social Security numbers for the tens of thousands of district employees. An undisclosed number of students enrolled at some point from 2013 through 2016 and some employees during that period appear to have lost information that includes their date of birth and address. California school districts don't collect student Social Security numbers.

The updated information comes by way of a "[Notice of Data Breach](#)" that the nation's second-largest school system was required under state law to send to potential victims.

School district officials Friday did not provide information on the number of possible victims. In addition to having to notify victims, a notice letter must be filed with the state attorney general when the number of those affected [surpasses 500](#) California residents, the mandated threshold for public notification.

District officials had previously stated that there would be a small but not-yet-determined number of victims — "outliers," as Supt. Alberto Carvalho described them. The victims would be notified and assisted, he added, while emphasizing that the overriding narrative was one of a worse disaster averted.

Hackers made off with about 500 gigabytes of data — a figure agreed on by both the hackers and the school system. That's a large haul compared with what an individual user would maintain, but a tiny fraction of the data under the control of L.A. Unified.

Stealing data is only one part of an attack. The second part involves encrypting computer systems so that its users cannot get in, paralyzing the ability to conduct everyday business. Hackers managed to encrypt servers in the district's facilities division, but had limited success elsewhere, even though normal operations, including classroom instruction and record-keeping, were more difficult for about two weeks. Schools never had to be temporarily closed — which has happened elsewhere when some school systems were attacked.

L.A. Unified refused to [pay a ransom](#) and hackers responded by releasing the data they had onto the dark web, where other bad actors could use it for such purposes as identify theft.

District officials have for months publicly characterized the attack as beginning and ending on Sept. 3 — the Saturday of the Labor Day weekend. District technicians, when they noticed the attack, moved quickly and with substantial success to limit its scope.

"In a very, very unique way, we stopped the attack midstream," Carvalho said [at a news conference in October](#). "That's very unusual. What usually happens is the entity finds out about the attack after the information was captured, uploaded, and the servers the system [are] encrypted. ... I can tell you that there have been a number of systems in this country who have fallen victim to this [same actor](#) that were not so lucky."

The follow-up investigation determined that an intrusion began as early as July 31.

"Between July 31, 2022, and Sept. 3, 2022, an unauthorized actor accessed and acquired certain files maintained on our servers," states the required notice, which was filed with the state last week.

[State records list](#) the span of the breach as beginning on July 31 and ending Sept. 3.

On Friday, the district said the original one-day attack scenario remains correct.

"The investigation revealed that the threat actor was engaged in reconnaissance on or about July 31, 2022," a district statement said. "The cyberattack began and ended on Sept. 3, 2022."

For cybersecurity experts, the disclosure in the notice letter was no surprise. They had predicted that an investigation would uncover that the intrusion into the system began earlier than what had been announced.

“Hackers are often inside networks for weeks or even months before they deploy the ransomware that encrypts the systems,” said Brett Callow, threat analyst for the cybersecurity company Emsisoft. “This means there’s a window of opportunity during which threats can be detected and neutralized before they become full-blown ransomware incidents.”

“In simple terms, a whole bunch of things happen before systems get locked,” he added. “The hacker needs to do recon, to get into the network, to ensure they can get back in, to gain access to other areas of the network, to exfiltrate data, etc., etc. All of these steps require them doing certain things — and those things can be detected if you’re looking for them.”

A newly [released Emsisoft report](#) indicates that the annual number of known cyberattacks on school systems in 2022 was about the same as in other recent years despite “executive orders, international summits, increased efforts to disrupt the ransomware ecosystem, and the creation by Congress of an interagency body, the [Joint Ransomware Task Force](#), to unify and strengthen efforts.”

But it is unclear if the attacks are causing increased harm, according to the report.

“A decrease in the level of disruption caused by attacks or in the amount paid in ransoms could be regarded as a win even if the number of incidents had increased,” the report states, while noting that data to draw such a conclusion was largely unavailable.

The L.A. Unified data-breach notice contained unwelcome news for district contractors based on the ongoing investigation.

“On Jan. 9, 2023, we identified labor compliance documents, including certified payroll records, that contractors provided to L.A. Unified in connection with Facilities Services Division projects,” the notice states. “Those files contained the names, addresses and Social Security numbers of contractor and subcontractor employees and other affiliated individuals.”

Carvalho, who became superintendent nearly a year ago, said recently that the district was more vulnerable because of preventable lapses. These included failing to follow through with key recommendations of an [internal cybersecurity audit](#) that was prepared more than two years ago, he said.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Hackers exploit flaw in Fortinet devices |
| SOURCE | https://therecord.media/suspected-chinese-hackers-exploit-vulnerability-in-fortinet-devices/ |
| GIST | <p>Suspected Chinese hackers have been targeting a European government entity and African managed service provider with new custom malware.</p> <p>According to a report released by Mandiant on Thursday, hackers exploited a recently patched vulnerability — CVE-2022-42475 — in FortiOS, an operating system developed by U.S. cybersecurity company Fortinet, as a zero-day.</p> <p>The exploitation occurred as early as October 2022, before the bug was fixed. In January, Fortinet warned its customers that hackers were using this vulnerability to target government networks.</p> <p>Mandiant identified a sophisticated new malware, which the researchers dubbed Boldmove, that exploited this vulnerability. Boldmove’s Linux variant was specifically designed to run on Fortinet’s FortiGate firewalls.</p> |

The researchers believe that this is the latest in a series of Chinese cyber espionage operations that have targeted internet-facing devices.

“We anticipate this tactic will continue to be the intrusion vector of choice for well-resourced Chinese groups,” Mandiant said.

Boldmove malware

Mandiant identified the Boldmove backdoor in December 2022. It is written in C programming language and has both Windows and Linux variants, the latter of which is intended to run in part on Fortinet devices as it reads data from files owned by the company.

When executed successfully, the malware allows attackers to gain full remote control of the affected FortiOS device.

Windows version of Boldmove was compiled as early as 2021, however, Mandiant has not seen this malware in use in the wild.

Mandiant researchers added that they suspect Chinese hackers are behind the attacks due to the tactics they used, as well as their targeting. Additionally, the malware was likely compiled on a computer configured to display Chinese characters and located in the UTC+8 time zone, which includes Australia, China, Russia, Singapore, and other Eastern Asian countries

Networking devices

Internet-facing devices used for managed security purposes, such as firewalls, IPS, and IDS appliances are attractive targets for hackers, according to Mandiant.

First, they have access to the internet, and if the attackers have an exploit, they can control the network without any victim interaction. “This allows the attacker to control the timing of the operation and can decrease the chances of detection,” Mandiant said.

Networking devices are typically intended to inspect network traffic, searching for anomalies as well as signs of malicious behavior, but are often not protected themselves.

The exploits required to compromise these devices are hard to develop, so they are often used against high-priority targets — in the government and defense sectors.

There is no mechanism to detect malicious processes running on internet-facing devices, according to Mandiant.

“This makes network devices a blind spot for security practitioners and allows attackers to hide in them and maintain stealth for long periods, while also using them to gain a foothold in a targeted network,” the research said.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/23 Sliver gains traction among threat actors |
| SOURCE | https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/threat-actors-turn-to-sliver-as-open.html |
| GIST | <p>The legitimate command-and-control (C2) framework known as Sliver is gaining more traction from threat actors as it emerges as an open source alternative to Cobalt Strike and Metasploit.</p> <p>The findings come from Cybereason, which detailed its inner workings in an exhaustive analysis last week.</p> <p>Sliver, developed by cybersecurity company BishopFox, is a Golang-based cross-platform post-exploitation framework that's designed to be used by security professionals in their red team operations.</p> |

Its myriad features for adversary simulation – including dynamic code generation, in-memory payload execution, and process injection – have also made it an appealing tool for threat actors looking to gain elevated access to the target system upon gaining an initial foothold.

In other words, the software is used as a second-stage to conduct next steps of the attack chain after already compromising a machine using one of the initial intrusion vectors such as spear-phishing or exploitation of unpatched flaws.

"Silver C2 implant is executed on the workstation as stage two payload, and from [the] Sliver C2 server we get a shell session," Cybereason researchers Loïc Castel and Meroujan Antonyan said. "This session provides multiple methods to execute commands and other scripts or binaries."

A hypothetical attack sequence detailed by the Israeli cybersecurity company shows that Sliver could be leveraged for privilege escalation, following it up by credential theft and lateral movement to ultimately take over the domain controller for the exfiltration of sensitive data.

Sliver has been weaponized in recent years by the Russia-linked [APT29](#) group (aka Cozy Bear) as well as cybercrime operators like [Shathak](#) (aka TA551) and [Exotic Lily](#) (aka Projector Libra), the latter of which is attributed to the Bumblebee malware loader.

That said, Sliver is far from the only open source framework to be exploited for malicious ends. Last month, Qualys [disclosed](#) how several hacking groups, including [Turla](#), [Vice Society](#), and [Wizard Spider](#), have utilized Empire for post-exploitation and to expand their foothold in victim environments.

"Empire is an impressive post exploitation framework with expansive capabilities," Qualys security researcher Akshat Pradhan said. "This has led to it becoming a frequent favorite toolkit of several adversaries."

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/23 Govt cyber advise for UK charity sector |
|----------|--|
| SOURCE | https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/government-cyber-advice-100bn-uk/ |
| GIST | <p>The UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has issued new guidance for charities designed to bolster their cybersecurity in the face of mounting threats.</p> <p>The document, <i>Cyber Threat Report: UK Charity Sector</i>, outlines the main threats to the sector and explains how organizations can enhance their cyber-resilience.</p> <p>With a combined income of £100bn, the country's 200,000 charities boast around six million volunteers and full-time employees. Around a third (30%) of them recorded a cyber-attack or breach over the past 12 months, according to a 2022 government report.</p> <p>The NCSC warned that charities are exposed to the same threats as most commercial organizations – ransomware, business email compromise, phishing and scam websites. However, they may be particularly vulnerable to attack given their high reliance on BYOD, large number of volunteers, minimal insurance coverage and limited funds to spend on cyber, it claimed.</p> <p>Charities not only suffer direct cyber-attacks but also fraudsters masquerading as them, which can divert vital funds donated by members of the public.</p> <p>"More charities are now offering online services and fundraising online, meaning reliable, trusted digital services are more important than ever. During the Ukraine crisis, we saw more criminals taking advantage of the generosity of the public, masquerading as charities for their own financial gain," said NCSC CEO, Lindy Cameron.</p> |

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| | <p>Helen Stephenson, CEO of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, argued that cybersecurity is no longer an optional extra for the sector but a critical part of good governance.</p> <p>“Charities play a crucial role in our society and in every community – they save lives, and they provide many of the services that make life worth living. All charities ultimately rely on public trust and continued public generosity,” she added.</p> <p>“So the impact of any cyber-attack on a charity can therefore be devastating, not just for the organization and those who rely on its services, but also in undermining public confidence and support.”</p> <p>The NCSC made several recommendations in its report, urging charities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the report’s specially crafted guidance for the sector • Use its staff training resources to improve employee cyber-awareness • Use the NCSC’s Active Cyber Defence services for enhanced resilience • Ensure the charity’s board understands its responsibilities regarding cybersecurity • Use Cyber Essentials to enhance best practice security – charities can now benefit from 20 free hours of support to implement its technical measures |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Massive ad fraud operation dismantled |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/massive-ad-fraud-op-dismantled-after-hitting-millions-of-ios-devices/ |
| GIST | <p>A massive ad fraud operation dubbed 'Vastflux' that spoofed more than 1,700 applications from 120 publishers, mostly for iOS, has been disrupted by security researchers at cybersecurity company HUMAN.</p> <p>The operation's name was derived from the VAST ad-serving template and the "fast flux" evasion technique used to conceal malicious code by rapidly changing a large number of IP addresses and DNS records associated with a single domain.</p> <p>According to HUMAN's report, Vastflux generated over 12 billion bid requests per day at its peak and impacted almost 11 million devices, many in Apple's iOS ecosystem.</p> <p>Vastflux details</p> <p>The research team at HUMAN (Satori) discovered Vastflux while investigating a separate ad fraud scheme. They noticed that an app was generating an unusually large number of requests using different app IDs.</p> <p>By reverse engineering the obfuscated JavaScript that operated in the app, the Satori team discovered the command and control (C2) server IP address it was communicating with and the ad-generating commands it sent.</p> <p>"What the team pieced together was an expansive malvertising operation in which the bad actors injected JavaScript into ad creatives they issued, and then stacked a whole bunch of video players on top of one another, getting paid for all of the ads when none of them were visible to the person using the device." – HUMAN</p> <p>Vastflux generated bids for displaying in-app ad banners. If it won, it placed a static banner image and injected obfuscated JavaScript into it.</p> <p>The injected scripts contacted the C2 server to receive an encrypted configuration payload, which included instructions on the position, size, and type of ads to be displayed, as well as data for spoofing real app and publisher IDs.</p> <p>Vastflux stacked up to 25 video ads on top of one another, all generating ad view revenue, but none of them was visible to the user as they were rendered behind the active window.</p> |

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| | <p>To evade detection, Vastflux omitted the use of ad verification tags, which allows marketers to generate performance metrics. By avoiding these, the scheme was made invisible to most third-party ad-performance trackers.</p> <p>Vastflux takedown</p> <p>Having mapped the infrastructure for the Vastflux operation, HUMAN launched three waves of targeted action between June and July 2022, involving customers, partners, and the spoofed brands, each delivering a blow to the fraudulent activity.</p> <p>Eventually, Vastflux took its C2 servers offline for a while and scaled down its operations, and on December 6, 2022, the ad bids went down to zero for the first time.</p> <p>While ad fraud does not have a malicious impact for the app users, it causes performance drops for the device, increases the use of battery and internet data, and can even lead to device overheating.</p> <p>The above are common signs of adware infections or ad fraud in the device, and users should treat them with suspicion and try to pinpoint the app(s) that account for most of the resource consumption.</p> <p>Video ads consume much more power than static ads, and multiple hidden video players aren't easy to hide from performance monitors, so it's crucial to always keep an eye on running processes and look for signs of trouble.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 FanDuel warns of data breach |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fanduels-warns-of-data-breach-after-customer-info-stolen-in-vendor-hack/ |
| GIST | <p>The FanDuel sportsbook and betting site is warning customers that their names and email addresses were exposed in a January 2023 MailChimp security breach, urging users to remain vigilant against phishing emails.</p> <p>On January 13th, MailChimp confirmed they suffered a breach after hackers stole an employee's credentials using a social engineering attack.</p> <p>Using these credentials, the threat actors accessed an internal MailChimp customer support and administration tool to steal the "audience data" for 133 customers.</p> <p>This audience data is different for each MailChimp customer but commonly contains the email addresses and names of customers, or potential customers, that are used to send marketing emails.</p> <p>Last Thursday, FanDuel emailed customers to warn them that the threat actors acquired their names and email addresses during the MailChimp breach.</p> <p>"Recently, we were informed by a third-party technology vendor that sends transactional emails on behalf of its clients like FanDuel that they had experienced a security breach within their system that impacted several of their clients," reads a FanDuel 'Notice of Third-Party Vendor Security Incident' seen by BleepingComputer.</p> <p>"On Sunday evening, the vendor confirmed that FanDuel customer names and email addresses were acquired by an unauthorized actor. No customer passwords, financial account information, or other personal information was acquired in this incident."</p> <p>FanDuel also stressed that this was not a breach of their systems or FanDuel user accounts and that the hackers did not acquire "passwords, financial account information, or other personal information" during the breach.</p> |

While the security incident notification did not name the third-party vendor that was breached, FanDuel confirmed to BleepingComputer that the third-party vendor was MailChimp.

"Remain vigilant"

FanDuel urges customers to "remain vigilant" against phishing attacks and attempted account takeovers after their data was exposed in this recent breach.

"Remain vigilant against email "phishing" attempts claiming an issue with your FanDuel account that requires providing personal or private information to resolve the problem," warns the FanDuel security incident email.

"FanDuel will never email customers directly and request personal information to resolve an issue."

FanDuel also warns customers to update their passwords frequently, [enable multi-factor authentication \(MFA\)](#) on their accounts, and not click on links in attempted password resets that a customer did not initiate.

While there is no indication that the stolen MailChimp data is being used in attacks, threat actors have abused this type of stolen data in past phishing campaigns.

In April 2022, a MailChimp breach allowed threat actors to steal the marketing email data for the Trezor hardware wallet.

This data was then used in a phishing campaign pretending to be [fake data breach notifications](#) that pushed malicious software to steal cryptocurrency wallets.

Furthermore, FanDuel accounts are in high demand, with threat actors actively performing credential-stuffing attacks to hack customers' accounts [\[1, 2, 3\]](#).

These accounts are sold on cybercrime marketplaces for as little as \$2, depending on an account's balance or linked payment information.

Enabling MFA on a FanDuel account using an authentication app will make it much harder for accounts to be stolen, even if a threat actor gains access to a customer's credentials.

Many account compromises are caused by using the same credentials at FanDuel as other sites then suffer data breaches. Threat actors then use these credentials to attempt to log in to accounts at other sites.

For this reason, using a password manager and creating unique passwords at every site is vital to prevent a breach at one company from affecting you at another.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 OneNote attachments spread malware |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-now-use-microsoft-onenote-attachments-to-spread-malware/ |
| GIST | <p>Threat actors now use OneNote attachments in phishing emails that infect victims with remote access malware which can be used to install further malware, steal passwords, or even cryptocurrency wallets.</p> <p>This comes after attackers have been distributing malware in emails using malicious Word and Excel attachments that launch macros to download and install malware for years.</p> <p>However, in July, Microsoft finally disabled macros by default in Office documents, making this method unreliable for distributing malware.</p> |

Soon after, threat actors began utilizing new file formats, such as ISO images and password-protected ZIP files. These file formats soon became extremely common, aided by a Windows bug allowing ISOs to bypass security warnings and the popular 7-Zip archive utility not propagating mark-of-the-web flags to files extracted from ZIP archives.

However, both 7-Zip and Windows recently fixed these bugs causing Windows to display scary security warnings when a user attempts to open files in downloaded ISO and ZIP files.

Not to be deterred, threat actors quickly switched to using a new file format in their malicious spam (malspam) attachments: Microsoft OneNote attachments.

Abusing OneNote attachments

Microsoft OneNote is a desktop digital notebook application that can be downloaded for free and is included in Microsoft Office 2019 and Microsoft 365.

As Microsoft OneNote is installed by default in all Microsoft Office/365 installations, even if a Windows user does not use the application, it is still available to open the file format.

Since mid-December, cybersecurity researchers warned that threat actors had started distributing malicious spam emails containing OneNote attachments.

From samples found by BleepingComputer, these malspam emails pretend to be DHL shipping notifications, invoices, ACH remittance forms, mechanical drawings, and shipping documents.

Unlike Word and Excel, OneNote does not support macros, which is how threat actors previously launched scripts to install malware.

Instead, OneNote allows users to insert attachments into a NoteBook that, when double-clicked, will launch the attachment.

Threat actors are abusing this feature by attaching malicious VBS attachments that automatically launch the script when double-clicked to download malware from a remote site and install it.

However, the attachments look like a file's icon in OneNote, so the threat actors overlay a big 'Double click to view file' bar over the inserted VBS attachments to hide them.

When you move the Click to View Document bar out of the way, you can see that the malicious attachment includes multiple attachments. This row of attachments makes it so that if a user double-clicks anywhere on the bar, it will double-click on the attachment to launch it.

Thankfully, when launching OneNote attachments, the program warns you that doing so can harm your computer and data.

But unfortunately, history has shown us that these types of prompts are commonly ignored, and users just click the OK button.

Protecting against these threats

Once installed, this type of malware allows threat actors to remotely access a victim's device to steal files, saved browser passwords, take screenshots, and in some cases, even record video using webcams.

Threat actors also commonly use remote access trojans to steal cryptocurrency wallets from victims' devices, making this a costly infection.

The best way to protect yourself from malicious attachments is to simply not open files from people you do not know. However, if you mistakenly open a file, do not disregard warnings displayed by the operating system or application.

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| | <p>If you see a warning that opening an attachment or link could harm your computer or files, simply do not press OK and close the application.</p> <p>If you feel it may be a legitimate email, share it with a security or Windows admin to help you verify if the file is safe.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Riot Games hacked; delays game patches |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/riot-games-hacked-delays-game-patches-after-security-breach/ |
| GIST | <p>Riot Games, the video game developer and publisher behind League of Legends and Valorant, says it will delay game patches after its development environment was compromised last week.</p> <p>The LA-based game publisher disclosed the incident in a Twitter thread on Friday night and promised to keep customers up-to-date with whatever an ongoing investigation discovers.</p> <p>"Earlier this week, systems in our development environment were compromised via a social engineering attack," the company said.</p> <p>"We don't have all the answers right now, but we wanted to communicate early and let you know there is no indication that player data or personal information was obtained."</p> <p>Riot Games also added that the breach directly impacted its ability to publish patches for its games.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, this has temporarily affected our ability to release content. While our teams are working hard on a fix, we expect this to impact our upcoming patch cadence across multiple games," Riot Games said.</p> <p>The development teams behind the League of Legends (LoL) multiplayer online battle arena and Teamfight Tactics (TFT) auto battler games confirmed the incident on Friday.</p> <p>The tweets also acknowledged future delays to changes planned to be implemented in the game and towards the release date of the next major patch.</p> <p>"This may impact our delivery date for Patch 13.2. The League team is working to stretch the limits of what we can hotfix in order to deliver the majority of the planned and tested balance changes on time still," the LoL team said.</p> <p>"Other things like the Ahri ASU might have to move to patch 13.3 (Feb. 8), but we'll keep you updated as we work through this."</p> <p>"This issue may impact our ability to release the full scope of balance changes planned, but we're working to implement the most meaningful of those possible through a hotfix at our scheduled patch time," the TFT team added.</p> <p>The head of League Studio, Andrei van Roon, added that nothing on the release plan for LoL's Patch 13.2 would be canceled.</p> <p>"Nothing that would have been in 13.2 will be cancelled, we might just have to move things that can't be hotfixed (e.g. art changes) to a later date instead," van Roon said.</p> <p>This comes after 2K Games, another major video game publisher, said in September 2020 that its help desk was hacked to infect some of its customers with malware.</p> |

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| | <p>One month later, 2K emailed users to warn that some of their data was stolen and put up for sale online after the September security breach.</p> <p>A Riot Games spokesperson was not immediately available for comment when contacted by BleepingComputer earlier today.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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|-------------------------------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/23 ENISA tool box: awareness raising in a box |
| SOURCE | https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2023/01/23/security-awareness-toolbox-enisa/?web_view=true |
| GIST | <p>The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) has made available Awareness Raising in a Box (AR-in-a-BOX), a “do it yourself” toolbox to help organizations in their quest to create and implement a custom security awareness raising program.</p> <p>The package includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guideline on how to build an internal cyber-awareness raising program tailored to employees’ needs • A guideline on creating an awareness campaign targeted at external stakeholders • A how-to guide on how to select the appropriate tools and channels to best reach the target audience and tips for effective communication in social media • Instructions on selecting the right metrics and developing key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the effectiveness of a program or campaign • A guide for the development of a communication strategy • An awareness raising game, in different versions and styles, for a generic audience and for an audience in the energy sector. It also comes with a guide on how it should be played • An awareness raising quiz to test comprehension and retention of key information (e.g., how to create good passwords) <p>Why security awareness matters</p> <p>People have become cyber-attackers’ primary attack vector, which means that programs for raising cyber awareness are crucial for an organization’s cybersecurity strategy. The goal of these programs is to promote good cybersecurity practices of employees, managers and executives and improve their cybersecurity behavior.</p> <p>A lot of advice can be found online on how to upgrade your security awareness efforts and engage your employees with better cybersecurity training, but sometimes organizations don’t know where to start.</p> <p>AR-in-a-BOX can help them wrap their head around the task and push them towards realization.</p> <p>“AR-in-a-Box is offered by ENISA to public bodies, operators of essential services, large private companies as well as small and medium ones (SMEs). [It] is dynamic and will be regularly updated and enriched,” the agency noted.</p> <p>ENISA has previously published helpful materials for cybersecurity awareness campaigns aimed at electricity operators and the healthcare sector.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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| HEADLINE | 01/21 ODIN, law enforcement contractor, hacked |
| SOURCE | https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgyjng/odin-intelligence-hacked |
| GIST | <p>Hackers have stolen more than 15GB of data from ODIN Intelligence, a law enforcement contractor which, among other things, recently had plans to track people experiencing homelessness with facial recognition. The cache includes a bevy of sensitive information, such as photos, reports, and other ODIN customer and internal data.</p> |

In one directory called “gallery” are 5,900 files. These include images such as mugshots, people, homes, vehicles, and peoples’ tattoos. Some of the files include identifying information, such as the name of the person in the filename or identity and Social Security cards.

Other files include field interrogation reports, and sex offender registration information. ODIN runs Sex Offender Notification and Registration (SONAR), a system used by local and state police for tracking sex offenders. The dump also included some polygraph reports, including of convicted sex offenders.

One file contains what appears to be user login information. This includes two FBI email addresses.

The data also contains what appears to be internal ODIN test data. One folder of more than 140 audio files contains many recordings of someone testing the app.

Reports generated by ODIN’s app SweepWizard are also included in the data. Law enforcement can use SweepWizard to coordinate the execution of search warrants or raids. Some of these reports contain false names of “organizing officers” such as “Superman” and “Captain America.” It is unclear if these are fabrications or placeholders for test purposes. ODIN’s CEO Erik McCauley is listed as a “commanding officer” in some reports. ODIN did not respond to a request for comment.

Transparency organization Distributed Denial of Secrets obtained the hacked data and shared it with Motherboard.

ODIN offers law enforcement a variety of products. Last year, [Motherboard reported on an ODIN brochure](#) for a product called the Homeless Management Information System, or HMIS. “Police use ODIN facial recognition to identify even non-verbal or intoxicated individuals,” the brochure read.

Earlier this month, [WIRED reported on a vulnerability in SweepWizard](#). After receiving a tip, WIRED found that anyone visiting a specific URL was able to view data from the SweepWizard app. WIRED said it found personal information about suspects which could tip off people that they were going to be raided. In response, ODIN removed the app from the Google Play and Apple App Store.

McCauley told WIRED in a statement at the time “ODIN Intelligence Inc. takes security very seriously. We have and are thoroughly investigating these claims.” He added, “Thus far, we have been unable to reproduce the alleged security compromise to any ODIN system. In the event that any evidence of a compromise of ODIN or SweepWizard security has occurred, we will take appropriate action.” Captain Jeffery Bratcher, an LAPD official, told WIRED that the department is taking the issue seriously.

“Operational security is always paramount to us. We don’t want people to know when and if we are coming,” he said.

Then on Sunday, [TechCrunch reported hackers had defaced ODIN’s website](#). The hackers claimed to have stolen data from the company too. Distributed Denial of Secrets told TechCrunch it received this data.

“ACAB,” the message read. “All (cyber-) cops are bastards! No nations! No borders! We are all illegal!”

At the time of writing, ODIN’s website is offline.

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Hate speech on Twitter accelerates |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/18/hate-speech-antisemitism-antigay-twitter/ |
| GIST | <p>SAN FRANCISCO — Earlier this month, the FBI charged a Florida man with making detailed online threats to murder 100 gay people. He had called previously for Black people to be killed and said that he planned to tear-gas a synagogue, according to the criminal complaint.</p> <p>Suspect Sean Michael Albert, who said that he had been joking, has found more to appreciate on Twitter since Elon Musk has taken control. The last 11 tweets he liked before his arrest were either from Musk or</p> |

by or about Andrew Tate, the kickboxer charged with human trafficking Musk recently let back on the platform.

There is no evidence that what Albert saw on Twitter inspired him to make his own posts, which court documents say were made on Discord, and his attorney didn't respond to a request for comment. But former employees and online researchers say that physical attacks in the United States have been tracking with Twitter spikes in some categories of hate speech, notably antisemitic and anti-gay slurs and rhetoric.

New research to be released later this month by the misinformation tracker [Network Contagion Research Institute](#) suggests a connection between real-world incidents and variations of the word "groomer," often aimed at gays and suggesting that they are adults bent on seducing children. Although polls indicate a significant minority of the population believes otherwise, gay people are [not more likely](#) to be predators than straight people.

Pre-Musk, Twitter had classed the word "groomer" as hate speech. But usage began spiking not long after Musk said he would buy the platform, and it has surged repeatedly since, often after real-world incidents like the [fatal shootings](#) at a gay club in Colorado.

"In the past three to four months, we have seen an increase in anti-LGBTQ incidents, and you can see a statistical correlation between these real-world incidents and the increased use of the term 'groomer' on Twitter," said Alexander Reid Ross, a Network Contagion analyst who shared the findings with The Washington Post. He did not say that use of the term had led to the violence.

The second biggest spike in tweets with the word "groomed" came just after Musk took control of Twitter. The biggest, to more than 4,000 in a day, came in late November, shortly before a record seven daily antigay attacks were recorded in the [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project](#), a nonprofit tracker of worldwide political violence, Ross said.

While hate language leading up to incidents could raise the possibility of it inspiring violence, hate language afterward is important as well, experts say. Calling the victims of violence "groomers" is "feeding into this highly pressurized, toxic discourse that condemns the victims and thus justifies further activity," said Ross.

Musk plays a role not just by loosening speech policies and slashing moderation staffing but through personal choices in his interactions, researchers say.

Recent antisemitic incidents included direct references to rapper Ye, who issued tweets against Jews after Musk welcomed him back to the platform after his suspension from Instagram. His return to Twitter saw him issue a pledge to go "death con 3 On JEWISH PEOPLE."

Even after Musk suspended Ye again, tweets referring to Jewish "privilege" or "supremacy" rose, according to Joel Finkelstein, director of Network Contagion and a senior fellow at Rutgers University.

An assailant who attacked a man in New York City's Central Park last month [shouted](#), "Kanye 2024" along with antisemitic comments as he did so, police said. In November, vandals spray-painted "Kanye was rite" along with swastikas on headstones in an Illinois [Jewish cemetery](#).

Hate crimes against Jews in New York jumped from nine in September to [45 in November](#), to make up more than half of bias incidents in the city, according to New York Police Department statistics.

White nationalists and some Black Americans at times amplified one another, Finkelstein said. Neo-Nazi groups posted memes on image boards with Ye as a heroic new Hitler, while Cynthia McKinney of Georgia, a Black American Green Party activist who served six terms in Congress, tweeted that 2022 is "the year of #TheNoticing, the year that gaslighting finally began not to work!" That hashtag, driven by hardcore antisemites on Twitter and image board 4chan, refers to a supposed discovery that some Jews are in influential positions. McKinney did not respond to requests for comment.

Finkelstein has seen the same patterns before, including [during an Israel-Hamas conflict](#) in May 2021. A team of analysts from Network Contagion and elsewhere examined 6 billion tweets and Reddit posts and recently found that the volume of tweets using human rights language was a better predictor of both U.S. street protests and antisemitic incidents than was the actual fighting in the Middle East.

“We found that in parallel with fighting, there is massive spike in words like colonialism and apartheid, and then there are incidents,” said Aviva Klompas, chief executive of Boundless, a nonprofit group that also worked on the study. “Then you see the long tail of that weaponized language, and the incidents keep coming.”

Twitter keeps both legitimate debate and hate alive longer and spreads them wider, Finkelstein said: “Wars going on in the world are also waged online, and social media has become the weapon to expand it from a local conflict to a clash of civilizations.”

Beyond dismissing most of Twitter’s trust and safety team and its outside safety advisory council, Musk has reinstated accounts that stoke extremism and tweeted an image of Pepe the Frog, mascot of the alt-right.

He also went out of his way to criticize former trust and safety chief Yoel Roth, who resigned after the November midterms and faulted Musk’s habit of deciding content rules on the fly. Musk took an [old Roth tweet](#) of an article describing a criminal ruling against a teacher who had sex with an 18-year-old student and added “this explains a lot” amid a push to portray himself as a great foe of child sex abuse images and Roth as one who let it slide on Twitter — prompting hordes of Twitter users to call Roth a “groomer.”

Though Musk had said that “incitement to violence” remains grounds for suspension, suggestions that Roth should be killed remained on the site after being reported by a longtime researcher who uses the Twitter handle @conspirator0.

Roth fled his home as accounts tweeted images to him, including one of a man feeding another into a woodchipper, with the words “how else are you gonna dispose of stupid” and a plural epithet. Other images included a firing squad with no caption and containers of bullets, one marked “box of pills that cure pedophilia.”

Some of the tweets and accounts were removed a day later, the researcher said. But similar replies are [still](#) up. Roth has put his house up for sale and moved, according to someone in touch with him. He declined to comment.

Musk’s new head of trust and safety, Ella Irwin, did not respond to an email seeking comment.

Roth also was singled out in tweets by the influential @LibsofTikTok account, which is led by activist [Chaya Raichik](#) and has 1.7 million followers.

The account has long crusaded against transgender medical treatment of young people at hospitals. A focus on Boston Children’s Hospital in August preceded [threats](#) against doctors there, while a Wisconsin school under fire for an investigation into the bullying of a transgender student temporarily [shut down](#) in May because of bomb threats and harassment.

Her spotlighting also has been followed by the Proud Boys and other violent groups protesting [parades](#) and other [events](#).

Task Force Butler Institute, a counter-extremism nonprofit group, last month [found](#) 281 LibsofTikTok tweets that mentioned a specific event, location or person between April and November. In 66 of those cases, reports followed of digital harassment or real-world incidents, including death threats and bomb threats. On several occasions, organizers canceled events in response.

Before Musk's takeover, complaints about LibsofTikTok sometimes resulted in individual tweets being deleted or week-long suspensions, including [twice in September](#).

After Musk's takeover, there have been no such suspensions, and he has personally [interacted](#) with the account, convincing some not to bother trying. "There's no point," said activist Erin Reed, who follows the account closely. Asked to comment, Raichik responded by accusing The Post of inciting violence against her.

Favorite subjects for the account have been drag shows and book readings, especially those open to minors. In November, it [pointed out](#) an upcoming performance at the Sunrise Theater in Moore County, N.C.

Minutes after the Dec. 3 show began, the lights went out. Two separate electronic substations had been shot with guns and disabled, leaving 40,000 people [without power](#) for days. The FBI is investigating the incident and declined to say whether it believes the blackout was aimed at the show.

Rumman Chowdhury, formerly Twitter director for machine-learning ethics and accountability, said that the escalation in hate speech and violence were predictable results of Musk's decisions but still deeply upsetting.

"It's certainly very jarring. It's very sad to see this thing that so many of us cared for and built being decimated piece by piece," she told The Post. "It's very hard to see where it's headed and how bad it's becoming."

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/21 Tech giants' layoffs reverse hiring spree |
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| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/21/business/tech-layoffs.html |
| GIST | <p>For a stretch of the pandemic, tech companies couldn't hire fast enough. Talent wars broke out in Silicon Valley, with firms vying for software engineers, often lavishing extravagant perks on their new and would-be hires. As profits soared, executives acted as if the party would never end.</p> <p>Now, it has — and workers are bearing the brunt of pullbacks. Nearly 200,000 tech employees have been laid off since the start of 2022, according to Layoffs.fyi, a site that tracks job cuts in the sector. Four of the largest tech companies — Alphabet, Amazon, Meta and Microsoft — have announced a total of more than 50,000 job cuts in recent months.</p> <p>But even after significant cuts, the largest tech companies are still behemoths. They grew enormously during the pandemic, adding tens of thousands of workers. The layoffs announced in recent weeks reverse a fraction of the hiring done in recent years.</p> <p>In announcing the layoffs to employees, executives struck notably apologetic tones, expressing regrets about overzealous expansion and rapid hiring. The executives pointed to economic factors, made worse by inflation and rising interest rates. But they are also admitting that they over-hired, misreading the durability of the pandemic acceleration in the growth of online services.</p> <p>AMAZON 1.54 million employees – 18,000 layoffs = 1.2% of work force* Number of employees, including warehouse workers, and layoffs Source: Company reports By The New York Times *Since the end of 2019, the company has grown by 728,000 people. "As part of our annual planning process for 2023, leaders across the company have been working with their teams and looking at their work force levels, investments they want to make in the future, and prioritizing what matters most to customers and the long-term health of our businesses. This year's review has been more difficult given the uncertain economy and that we've hired rapidly over the last several years."</p> |

— Andy Jassy, chief executive, [Jan. 4](#)

ALPHABET

186,779 employees – 12,000 layoffs = 6.4% of work force

Number of **employees** and **layoffs**

Source: Company reports

By The New York Times

“I take **full responsibility for the decisions that led us here**. Over the past two years we’ve seen periods of dramatic growth. To match and fuel that growth, we hired for a different economic reality than the one we face today.”

— Sundar Pichai, chief executive, [Jan. 20](#)

META

87,314 employees – 11,000 layoffs = 12.6% of work force

Number of **employees** and **layoffs**

Source: Company reports

By The New York Times

“At the start of Covid, the world rapidly moved online and the surge of e-commerce led to outsized revenue growth. Many people predicted this would be a permanent acceleration that would continue even after the pandemic ended. I did too, so I made the decision to significantly increase our investments. **Unfortunately, this did not play out the way I expected.**”

— Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive, [Nov. 9](#)

MICROSOFT

221,000 employees – 10,000 layoffs = 4.5% of work force

Number of **employees** and **layoffs**

Source: Company reports

By The New York Times

“We’re living through times of significant change, and as I meet with customers and partners, a few things are clear. First, as we saw customers accelerate their digital spend during the pandemic, **we’re now seeing them optimize their digital spend to do more with less.**”

— Satya Nadella, chief executive, [Jan. 18](#)

[Return to Top](#)

Terrorism, Extremism

[Top of page](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/22 Atlanta protest domestic terrorism arrests |
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| SOURCE | https://www.foxnews.com/us/atlanta-domestic-terrorism-suspects-seen-smiling-stone-faced-post-anti-police-riot-booking-photos |
| GIST | <p>The six accused domestic terrorists arrested when anti-police protests devolved into violence Saturday night in downtown Atlanta were seen either smiling or stone-faced in their booking photos.</p> <p>The Atlanta Police Department identified the six suspects – all who came from outside Georgia – to Fox News Digital on Sunday afternoon. They are Nadja Geier, 24, of Nashville, Tennessee; Madeleine Feola, 22, of Spokane, Washington; Ivan Ferguson, 23, of Nevada; Graham Evatt, 20, of Decatur, Georgia; Francis Carrol, 22, of Kennebunkport, Maine; and Emily Murphy, 37, of Grosse Isle, Michigan.</p> <p>The six are each facing eight misdemeanor and felony charges.</p> <p>The misdemeanor charges are pedestrian in a roadway, willful obstruction of a law enforcement officer, riot, and unlawful assembly. They each also face felony counts of second-degree criminal damage, first-degree arson, interference with government property and domestic terrorism.</p> |

The Daily Mail reported that a person with the same name, age and hometown as Carrol was one of five suspects arrested just last month on domestic terrorism and other charges at the self-proclaimed autonomous zone at the site of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center.

The Atlanta Police Department did not address Fox News Digital's question as to why or how Carrol was released from custody in December.

In December, The Mail also reported that Carrol was the son of a [millionaire Maine surgeon](#) who grew up in one of the most luxurious beach towns on the East Coast, home to the George Bush family compound.

On Sunday, Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens appeared on CBS News and rebuked those claiming that the anti-police riot seen overnight in his city were not violent, noting how the suspects had explosives, burned down a police car and broke windows of businesses. Dickens stopped short of claiming the protesters were part of any particular organization, such as [Black Lives Matter or Antifa](#), but vowed domestic terrorism charges and to make sure anyone provoking violence gets "held accountable."

Saturday's protests were in response to the death of 26-year-old environmental activist [Manuel Esteban Paez Teran](#), who was shot and killed by Georgia State Patrol.

Teran reportedly went by the name Tortuguita, identified as nonbinary, and used they/it pronouns. Authorities said Teran first shot and wounded a trooper tasked with clearing protesters from the construction site of a new public safety training center dubbed by activists as "Cop City."

State officers allegedly returned fire, but authorities said there was no body-camera video of the shooting, prompting the chaotic demonstrations overnight.

Dickens, a Democrat, defended the public safety training center, arguing that the building aims to answer the calls from 2020's protests in better training for police officers and firefighters. But, the mayor argued, the activists who remain at the construction site "don't want to see anything built that supports police."

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Iran vows 'reciprocal' response to EU |
| SOURCE | https://www.arabnews.com/node/2236996/middle-east |
| GIST | <p>TEHRAN: Iran on Sunday warned the European Union it would take "reciprocal" measures after the European Parliament voted to list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist group.</p> <p>"The parliament is working to place elements of European countries' armies on the terrorist list" of the Islamic republic, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Twitter.</p> <p>Members of the European Parliament voted on Wednesday to include the Guards on the 27-nation bloc's terror list in "light of its terrorist activity, the repression of protesters and its supplying of drones to Russia."</p> <p>The vote is non-binding but comes with EU foreign ministers already due to discuss tightening sanctions on Iran next week.</p> <p>Amir-Abdollahian and Guards chief Major General Hossein Salami attended a closed-door parliament session on Sunday morning to discuss the European Parliament's move.</p> <p>"The European Parliament shot itself in the foot," Iran's top diplomat said, adding that the response would be "reciprocal."</p> <p>Later asked if Iran would consider withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or expel United Nations nuclear inspectors, Amir-Abdollahian said all options were on the table.</p> |

If European diplomats “who have no experience in diplomacy... do not correct their positions, every possibility is conceivable,” he was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA.

Iran has been a signatory to the NPT since 1970, the year it came into force, and has always denied it has any ambitions to acquire or manufacture an atomic bomb, despite some Western accusations.

Its nuclear program was a source of tensions with Western powers until a deal was reached in 2015, providing Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear activity.

But the deal has been hanging by a thread since 2018 when the United States unilaterally withdrew and reimposed biting sanctions, prompting Tehran to begin rolling back on its commitments.

Iran and world powers have been engaged in on-and-off talks to restore the deal, but discussions have been in deep freeze since last year.

Iran’s parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf also said on Sunday that the legislature would “retaliate immediately and decisively” if the EU upholds and ratifies the European Parliament’s vote.

Ghalibaf, who is himself a former commander of the Guards air force, added that parliament would “recognize the armies of the European countries... as terrorist groups.”

The Guards oversee the volunteer Basij paramilitary force, which has been deployed against protests since mid-September triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini, 22, after her arrest for allegedly violating Iran’s dress code for women.

Authorities in Iran say hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed and thousands arrested in the unrest.

The United States has already placed both the Guards and its foreign arm, the Quds Force, on its list of “foreign terrorist organizations.”

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/22 Military captures 2 ISIS members in Syria |
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| SOURCE | https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/syria/2023/01/23/us-military-captures-two-isis-members-in-syria/ |
| GIST | <p>US forces have captured two ISIS members in an air and ground assault in eastern Syria, the US military's Central Command has said.</p> <p>The raid took place on Saturday, Centcom spokesman Col Joe Buccino said on Sunday.</p> <p>He said one civilian received “minor injuries” during the attack and was treated at a nearby medical facility before being released back to his family.</p> <p>Centcom described the militants as facilitators — a logistics specialist and an “associate” of the extremist group.</p> <p>Centcom alluded to the presence of “partner forces” — previously used to refer to the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Syrian Kurdish armed group that helped the US and its allies defeat ISIS.</p> <p>The command did not immediately return a message seeking further information about the attack.</p> <p>After the extremists lost their last scraps of territory following a military onslaught backed by the coalition in March 2019, ISIS remnants in Syria mostly retreated into desert hideouts in the country's east.</p> <p>They have since used such hideouts to ambush Kurdish-led forces and Syrian government troops, while continuing to mount attacks in Iraq.</p> |

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| | On Friday, Centcom said a drone attack hit a US-led coalition base in southern Syria. A war monitoring group said it was launched by Iran-backed groups. |
| Return to Top | |
| HEADLINE | 01/22 US: GRU, RIM Spain letter-bomb campaign |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/us/politics/russia-spain-letter-bombs.html |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — American and European officials believe that Russian military intelligence officers directed associates of a white supremacist militant group based in Russia to carry out a recent letter bomb campaign in Spain whose most prominent targets were the prime minister, the defense minister and foreign diplomats, according to U.S. officials.</p> <p>Spanish and foreign investigators have been looking into who sent six letter bombs in late November and early December to sites mostly in Madrid, including the official residence of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, which also serves as his office; the American and Ukrainian Embassies; and the Defense Ministry. No one was killed in the attacks, which U.S. officials consider terrorism. An employee of the Ukrainian Embassy was injured when one of the packages exploded.</p> <p>Investigators in recent weeks have focused on the Russian Imperial Movement, a radical group that has members and associates across Europe and military-style training centers in St. Petersburg, the officials said. They added that the group, which has been designated a global terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department, is believed to have ties to Russian intelligence agencies. Important members of the group have been in Spain, and the police there have tracked its ties with far-right Spanish organizations.</p> <p>U.S. officials say the Russian officers who directed the campaign appeared intent on keeping European governments off guard and may be testing out proxy groups in the event Moscow decides to escalate a conflict.</p> <p>The apparent aim of the action was to signal that Russia and its proxies could carry out terrorist strikes across Europe, including in the capitals of member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which is helping defend Ukraine against Russia's invasion, said the U.S. officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivities around the investigation. Spain is a member of the alliance and has given military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, as well as diplomatic support.</p> <p>One of the letter bombs was sent to Instalaza, a weapons maker in Zaragoza that manufactures grenade launchers that Spain is giving to Ukraine, and another went to the Torrejón de Ardoz Air Base outside Madrid.</p> <p>There are no signs that Moscow is ready to engage in widespread covert attacks or sabotage in Europe, which Russian officials believe could provoke a response from NATO and, potentially, a costly wider conflict, according to U.S. and allied officials. For that same reason, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and his generals have not ordered a conventional attack on a NATO country.</p> <p>Mr. Putin's calculus on terrorist attacks could change if Russia continues to suffer major setbacks in Ukraine, U.S. officials say. Mr. Putin has given his military intelligence agency wide latitude to develop and conduct covert operations in Europe, but the degree to which the Kremlin was involved in the letter bomb operation is unclear, they say.</p> <p>"This seems like a warning shot," said Nathan Sales, the State Department's counterterrorism coordinator in the Trump administration, when the Russian Imperial Movement was designated a terrorist organization. "It's Russia sending a signal that it's prepared to use terrorist proxies to attack in the West's rear areas."</p> <p>The Russian officers behind the bombing campaign work for the Main Directorate, commonly referred to as the G.R.U., one of Moscow's more aggressive intelligence shops, U.S. officials say. In recent years, the group has carried out bold and lethal covert actions with impunity.</p> |

Members of the agency have been involved in a range of shadowy activities, from interfering in the 2016 U.S. presidential election to [shooting down a Malaysian civilian airliner](#) over Ukraine in 2014, according to U.S. officials.

One specific part of the agency, Unit 29155, has tried to [destabilize Europe](#) through attempted coups and assassinations, according to U.S. and European security officials. Its agents include Russian war veterans, and it was so secretive that most G.R.U. operatives probably did not know it existed. American and allied officials learned about the unit only in recent years.

U.S. officials suspect that the Russian officers involved in the Spain action are part of the 161st Special Purpose Specialist Training Center, whose headquarters in eastern Moscow house Unit 29155, among other groups, U.S. officials say.

Spanish investigators have identified “persons of interest” they believe were involved in the attacks, one senior U.S. official said.

A spokeswoman for the Spanish Embassy in Washington declined to comment, citing the continuing inquiry.

Fiona Hill, a senior director for Europe and Russia on the White House National Security Council in the Trump administration, said it would not be surprising if the G.R.U. had directed the Russian Imperial Movement to carry out the attacks.

“Most of these kinds of organizations are of course linked to Russian intelligence, either the G.R.U. or the F.S.B.,” she said, referring also to the Federal Security Service, Russia’s domestic intelligence agency. “Oftentimes they’re just front groups for the intelligence activities.”

Intelligence agents use the groups to sow confusion and create “implausible deniability,” she added.

American and British intelligence officials have been working with the Spanish national police and counterintelligence officials on the investigation. Their suspicions about the Russian Imperial Movement and the G.R.U. coalesced late last year, soon after the bombs were discovered, U.S. officials say.

The radical group is only partially aligned with the Russian government. The movement’s leadership has criticized the incompetence of Russian leadership in the Ukraine war and accused Mr. Putin of corruption. Yet because the group shares Moscow’s aims of undermining Western governments and sowing chaos in Europe, Russian intelligence has been able to influence its operations, according to American officials.

The ability to use the Russian Imperial Movement as a sometime proxy force is useful to Russian intelligence, particularly because that makes it more difficult for rival countries to attribute actions to the Russian government.

The State Department [designated the group](#) and its leadership global terrorists in April 2020, the [first time](#) such a label had been applied to a white supremacist group.

“R.I.M. has provided paramilitary-style training to white supremacists and neo-Nazis in Europe and actively works to rally these types of groups into a common front against their perceived enemies,” the department said in the announcement of the designation.

The department said the group had two training centers in St. Petersburg that “are likely being used for woodland and urban assault, tactical weapons and hand-to-hand combat training.”

The leaders designated by the State Department were Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, who founded the group in St. Petersburg in 2002; Denis Valiullovich Gariyev, the leader of its paramilitary arm, the Russian Imperial Legion; and Nikolay Nikolayevich Trushchalov, an organizer of the group’s activities abroad.

The department said that two Swedes who committed a series of bombings in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 2016 had attended a training course run by the Russian group. The perpetrators, who were convicted in court, had targeted a refugee shelter, a shelter for asylum seekers and a cafe.

The Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University [describes the Russian Imperial Movement](#) as “white supremacist, monarchist, ultranationalist, pro-Russian Orthodox and antisemitic.” The group advocates the restoration of czarist rule to Russia, it said, and nurtures ties with neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups in the United States and Europe.

American and European security officials have had growing concerns about [white supremacist groups with transnational links](#) for most of the last decade. In 2019, for example, an Australian man who killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, published a manifesto online before the massacre saying he had drawn inspiration from white extremist terrorism attacks in Europe and the United States.

As a result of the recent letter bombs, U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism officials have increased their scrutiny of the Russian Imperial Movement, including updating terrorist watchlists to flag suspected leaders of the group or its members, U.S. officials said.

Russian intelligence agents have attracted more attention from counterintelligence officials and police departments in recent years as they have carried out increasingly bold operations, particularly in Europe.

In 2018, they [tried to kill](#) Sergei V. Skripal, a former G.R.U. officer recruited by Britain as a spy, by poisoning him and his daughter at their residence in England; those two barely survived, but a British woman died. Russian agents have also carried out [bombings and assassination attempts](#) in the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, and tried to pull off a coup in [Montenegro](#), according to European intelligence officials.

The same elite group active in Europe, Unit 29155, has operated in Afghanistan and [offered bounties](#) to reward Taliban-linked militants for killing American and coalition troops, according to a U.S. intelligence assessment first reported by The New York Times. American officials said in 2021 that they [had no evidence](#) showing the Kremlin had ordered the covert action.

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/22 Spokane woman domestic terrorism arrest |
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| SOURCE | https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/cop-city-protests-out-of-state-arrest/85-2afae29a-140b-45c0-9fc2-1f593b63f506 |
| GIST | <p>ATLANTA — Six people were arrested Saturday night when protests over the future site of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center turned violent in Downtown Atlanta, police said.</p> <p>Atlanta Police Department confirmed that five of the six people were arrested were from out of state. One person that was taken into custody was from Decatur. They are all being charged with domestic terrorism, a felony.</p> <p>"They had explosives, they burned down a police car, they broke windows at businesses," Dickens said on CBS Face the Nation. "And so our police department, along with our state and federal partners took swift action within two blocks and brought that situation under control. And the violence stopped."</p> <p>Here is the identity of each person and where they are from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nadja Geier, a 24-year-old woman from Nashville, Tennessee• Madeleine Feola, a 22-year-old woman from Spokane, Washington• Ivan Ferguson, a 23-year-old man from Nevada• Graham Evatt, a 20-year-old man from Decatur, Georgia• Francis Carrol, a 22-year-old man from Kennebunkport, Maine (his second arrest for domestic terrorism charges relating to "Cop City")• Emily Murphy, a 37-year-old woman from Grosse Isle, Michigan |

In addition to domestic terrorism charges, they are each being charged with first degree arson, second degree criminal damage, and interference with government property -- all felonies. They also face multiple misdemeanor charges, as well.

Dickens said that while many protested peacefully, some had explosives, broke windows at businesses and burned a patrol cruiser.

"And it should be noted that these individuals were not Atlanta or Georgia residents. Most of them traveled into our city to wreak havoc," he said.

On Wednesday, a demonstrator was [killed by law enforcement where the Georgia Bureau of Investigation said the 26-year-old shot a state trooper](#).

That same day, police said they made 7 arrests. None of those demonstrators were from Georgia, either.

The protesters have opposed the facility on environmental and historical grounds, saying it would decimate one of the largest preserved forest areas in the city and [desecrate historically Native American land](#) of the Muscogee Creek people, who once lived in the woods and called it the Weelaunee Forest before being displaced by white settlers in the early 19th Century.

They also oppose it on the grounds that the land was once the site of the Old Prison Farm, a jail complex that was [billed during its operation](#) in the mid-20th Century as an "Honor Farm" where prisoners farmed the land as a "dignified" means of imprisonment, a practice which has [since been scrutinized](#) for its profit generation and exploitation of unpaid labor.

Atlanta Police have [characterized the tree-sitters occupying the forest as outsiders](#), though there has also [been visible local opposition](#) from community groups who oppose the facility both environmentally and for its placement in a predominantly Black section of the city. The police chief [previously said](#) several arrested on the site had out-of-state driver's licenses.

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/20 Military strikes al-Shabab in Somalia |
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| SOURCE | https://newscubic.co.in/2023/01/22/us-air-strike-on-terrorist-bases-in-somalia-30-al-shabaab-fighters-killed/ |
| GIST | <p>On Friday (January 20), the US military carried out a major attack in the Somali city, in which 30 Al Shabaab fighters were killed. Fighting is going on here between Somalia's army and Al Shabaab fighters. This attack by the US Army took place near Galkad, 260 km north-east of Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. According to the US Africa Command, no civilian was injured or killed in this attack. According to a defense official, US forces were not present on the ground at the time of the airstrike.</p> <p>In May 2022, President Joe Biden approved the Pentagon's request to redeploy US troops to the region in an effort to counter the terrorist group. Since then, the US has continued to support the Somali government.</p> <p>US support for Somalia</p> <p>"Somalia remains central to stability and security throughout East Africa," the US military said in a statement on Saturday. Will continue."</p> <p>America's major attacks in the last few months</p> <p>According to CNN reports, the US military has carried out several strikes in the region in recent months, resulting in dozens of al-Shabaab casualties. Last October, a US strike killed two Al-Shabaab members some 218 kilometers northwest of Mogadishu. A later November attack killed 17 al-Shabaab fighters some 285 km northeast of Mogadishu. In late December, another US strike killed six al-Shabaab members near the town of Kadel.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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|-------------------------------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Southern CBP nabs 17 on terror watch list |
| SOURCE | https://www.foxnews.com/politics/border-patrol-nabbed-17-people-fbi-terror-watch-list-southern-border-december |
| GIST | <p>Border Patrol agents stopped 17 people on the FBI's terror watch list at the southern border in December, bringing the total of individuals arrested at the southern border to 38 already for the current fiscal year.</p> <p>Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) latest numbers for December, released on Friday, revealed Border Patrol has arrested 17 people at the southern border whose names match on the FBI's Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB) -- which contains information about the identities of those who are known or "reasonably suspected" of being involved in terrorist activities.</p> <p>December's numbers bring the total number of terror watch list arrests between the ports of entry since FY 2023 began on Oct 1. to 38.</p> <p>There were 98 terror watch list arrests in FY22, 15 in FY21 and just three in FY 20 at the southern border caught between ports of entry.</p> <p>At the ports of entry at the northern and southern borders, meanwhile, CBP's Office of Field Operations has encountered 125 people on the TSDB so far this fiscal year. In FY 2022 there were 380 apprehensions, 157 in FY21 and 196 in FY20.</p> <p>While the numbers encountered by Border Patrol are a slim fraction of the more than 251,000 migrants encountered at the southern border in December, it has raised concerns from Republicans not only about some of the people trying to get into the U.S. -- but also how many may be slipping past overwhelmed Border Patrol agents.</p> <p>CBP sources told Fox News this week that there were more than 70,000 gotaways in the month of December, similar to the number detected in November. There were nearly 600,000 in FY 2022.</p> <p>Republicans have pointed to the enormous numbers at the border, including gotaways, to dispute the claim by the Biden administration that the border is "secure." The Biden administration, meanwhile, said this week that it is dealing with a mass migration that has "gripped our hemisphere."</p> <p>"The threats and the challenges we face are evolving, increasingly diverse, and dynamic. Yet we can meet this moment if and only if we work together," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said at the U.S. Conference of Mayors.</p> <p>He also said DHS was "executing a comprehensive strategy to secure our borders and build a safe, orderly and humane immigration system working within a broken system in desperate need of legislative reform."</p> <p>However, Republicans on the House Homeland Security Committee have promised to increase scrutiny on the administration's policies in the wake of the new numbers, and taking aim at "this refusal to enforce law and order at the border."</p> <p>"We look forward to having Secretary Mayorkas before the Committee soon to provide answers and accountability for the significant threat these border security policies have had on our homeland security posture," Chairman Mark Green said in a statement on Friday.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Canada to repatriate 'Jihadi Jack' terrorist |
| SOURCE | https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2023/01/22/british-born-isis-terrorist-jihadi-jack-to-be-repatriated-to-canada/ |
| GIST | A British-born ISIS fighter nicknamed "Jihadi Jack" is among 23 people linked to the terror group set to be repatriated to Canada. |

Muslim convert [Jack Letts](#), 28, held dual British and Canadian citizenship when he travelled from Oxfordshire to Syria in 2014 to join ISIS.

He referred to himself as an “enemy of Britain” and spent three years with the group before being captured by western-backed Kurdish forces in 2017.

The man nicknamed “Jihadi Jack” by the British media has spent the past six years in prison in northern Syria.

The Home Office in 2019 stripped him of his British passport, rendering him the responsibility of the Canadian government.

The move sparked angry words between the two powers, with Ottawa accusing London of “offloading its responsibilities” on its ally.

Letts had pleaded with the Conservative government to allow him to return to his country of birth, pledging he had “no intention” of harming anyone.

He said that while he was “not innocent”, he had hoped to be allowed to face justice in Britain.

[The Canadian government has agreed to take back 23 of its citizens](#) — including Letts — following a court case brought against it by the detainees’ relatives.

The families argued Ottawa was obliged to repatriate the group under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Canada's foreign ministry on Friday announced its decision to repatriate six Canadian women and 13 infants. And the Canadian federal court later ruled that four men seeking repatriation as part of the group must also be sent back to Canada, said lawyer Barbara Jackman, who is representing one of the men.

In its ruling, the court cited the poor conditions of the prison where the men are detained and that they have not been charged or brought to trial.

“The conditions of the ... men are even more dire than those of the women and children who Canada has just agreed to repatriate,” the ruling stated.

“There is no evidence any of them have been tried or convicted, let alone tried in a manner recognised or sanctioned by international law.”

The move came after security experts [warned of a potential return of ISIS this year](#) if the West does not step up its support for the Kurdish-led [Syrian Democratic Forces](#) guarding prisons and camps housing terrorists and their families.

[Dr Paul Stott](#), head of security and extremism at the Policy Exchange think tank, told *The National* the SDF “are not going to be able to do this indefinitely”.

“If we don't have a resolution to this, [ISIS fighters] may break out from prisons,” he said.

“There's also the issue that some of the young people who are coming of age in these camps are of fighting age and are ideal recruits for ISIS.”

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Report: China modern weaponry to Taliban |
| SOURCE | https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/international/2327667-china-providing-modern-weaponry-to-taliban-report |

China is providing modern weaponry to the Taliban in the wake of the recent attack by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) on a hotel in Kabul that mostly housed Chinese nationals, writes Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai, author of *The Troubled Triangle: US-Pakistan Relations under the Taliban's Shadow* in The Jamestown Foundation. The move comes as unstable and volatile Afghanistan threatens Chinese interests and could be a hurdle to the success of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Moreover, Chinese sources have expressed concern that uncertainty and unrest could lead to Afghanistan becoming a hotbed for terrorists "targeting China's Xinjiang and its interests overseas, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, where enhanced communication and coordination between China and Pakistan is required to tackle potential threats," reported Global Times. On December 12, members of ISKP attacked a local hotel in Kabul, where several Chinese nationals were staying. The attack injured five Chinese nationals along with 18 other victims, while the three attackers were killed by security forces.

It was reported that Chinese businesspeople run the hotel, which is frequently visited by Chinese diplomats and business people, reported Global Times. In response, People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin stated, "China is deeply shocked at the attack, which is highly egregious, and firmly opposes terrorism in any form."

In response to these challenges, China has sought to provide the Taliban with enough support to combat all forms of terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan, said Yousafzai. Several factors have recently driven China to deepen its engagement with and support for the Taliban. When Kabul fell to the Taliban, the world was stunned and concerned about the Taliban in power; however, some countries like Iran, Russia, China, and Pakistan were among those expecting stability in Afghanistan and asking the international community to help the Taliban stabilize the country.

In addition, China saw the US presence in Afghanistan as a strategic threat to China. As a result, the US withdrawal and the return to power of the Taliban, with whom Beijing has close ties, were generally seen as advantageous geopolitical developments for China, reported The Jamestown Foundation. China has strategic, political, economic, and security interests in Afghanistan that it wants to secure. The existence of any central administration ruling Kabul that is comfortable with China is favorable to the latter.

China-Taliban engagement is not new. The Taliban have been frequent visitors to China for years. Even in the 1990s, Beijing engaged with the Taliban to curb militants' infiltration into western China. Afghanistan is important to Beijing strategically and economically as it connects China with the Persian Gulf and Iran. Similarly, Afghanistan is a potential route for BRI with extensive natural resources.

Hence, China had been pressing the Taliban to take a clear stance vis-a-vis militancy, i.e., East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). So far, the Taliban have stated unequivocally that they will not interfere in the internal affairs of any country, said Yousafzai. China is providing humanitarian aid and concessions to the Taliban government; however, several developments are still off the record.

One such behind-the-scenes development is China's provision of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to the Taliban, which has significantly boosted its forces' combat capabilities, reported The Jamestown Foundation. The first drone was attained through a front company from China and cost USD 60,000, which engineers tailored to carry four mortar rounds, reported New Lines Magazine on September 15, 2021.

However, the drone unit still uses modified commercial drones for surveillance and operations. In order to upgrade its UAV capabilities, the Taliban have struck a deal with China to purchase Blowfish attack drones. The Blowfish strengthens the Taliban's combat capability in operations against its opponents, especially ISKP. It will also put considerable pressure on other resistance movements, including the National Resistance Front in the Panjshir Valley, reported The Jamestown Foundation.

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| | <p>China has economic, political, security and strategic interests in Afghanistan and has maintained close contact with the Taliban over the last decade. Moreover, Beijing wants the Taliban not to allow Afghanistan's soil to be used as a base for operations targeting China.</p> <p>However, China's reported delivery of combat drones to the Taliban will considerably impact US-China relations and the Taliban's combat capability to target ISKP and other adversaries, said Yousafzai.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 New militant group emerges in Niger Delta |
| SOURCE | https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/01/breaking-new-militant-group-force-of-egbesu-emerges-in-ndelta-threatens-2023-elections/ |
| GIST | <p>A new militant group, The Force of Egbesu, has surfaced in the creeks of the Niger Delta with stern warnings to President Muhammadu Buhari and state governors to do the needful for the wellbeing of the oil-rich region, or else hell will be let loose during the February general elections in the region.</p> <p>In an electronic mail and video released weekend, the leader of the group, who identified himself as General Gbolodi, lamented the abandonment meted out to him and his group since 2010 by political leaders on one hand, and the utter neglect of the oil-rich Bashan Clan in the creeks of Niger Delta on the other hand.</p> <p>The statement reads in part: “I am calling on the PDP and APC leaders who do not want development in the region to quickly make amends, else it will be too late. I want to particularly call on political leaders of PDP and APC in Bayelsa State, that Bashan Clan is blessed with crude oil with no meaningful development, it remains in shanties.</p> <p>“They failed in all their promises made to us, I have worked for both the PDP and APC in the state with failed promises; failed promises to me, failure promises to my area.</p> <p>“I’m issuing this message to President Buhari and Gov. Douye Diri, that if you know what to do to remedy the injustices done us and our oil-rich land, then come to us for dialogue. But if you are reluctant to do the needful, I’m coming for you, there shall be no elections in Bashan Clan and other areas in February.</p> <p>“We are waiting diligently for your understanding, we are waiting for your response to our grievances, that is, the utter neglect and abandonment meted out as punishment to us and the area.</p> <p>“If it seems good for you to use force on us, we are battle-ready, we’re not afraid of the Pharaohs and Goliaths you have and we’re here waiting for those you will send. We know that death is a syndrome open to all and sundry, we’re ready for war!</p> <p>“If you failed to reach out to us before the February elections, there will be no elections in Bashan Clan in Southern Ijaw local government area and other parts of the region. Note that it’s not just a threat”.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 NYPD nabs suspect sowing terror overseas |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/nyregion/nypd-terror-law-abdullah-el-faisal.html |
| GIST | <p>The New York Police Department’s target was 1,500 miles away and across the sea.</p> <p>Abdullah el-Faisal, the man investigators wanted, had an international history as a promoter of extremism. He had been imprisoned in Britain for inciting hatred and soliciting murder before being sent home to Jamaica, where he established himself with a website and lectures. He had caught the attention of the department’s Intelligence Bureau after promoting jihad and encouraging the murder of Jews, Hindus and Americans.</p> <p>None of the crimes New York prosecutors say he committed — which include spreading Islamic State propaganda and helping a woman who said she wanted to marry an ISIS fighter — occurred while Mr.</p> |

Faisal was anywhere near the city. But in a Manhattan courtroom, Mr. Faisal, 59, has become the first person to go to trial under state [laws adopted days after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001](#) that made it a felony to give terrorists financial or other material support before an attack.

To make their case, New York investigators took on fake identities, chatted with Mr. Faisal via WhatsApp messages and Skype and even traveled to the Middle East. They established jurisdiction merely by communicating with Mr. Faisal from Manhattan.

Cyrus R. Vance Jr., who was the Manhattan district attorney when Mr. Faisal was indicted, said the far-flung investigation kept the city safe.

“Our defensive perimeter isn’t just the East River and the Hudson River,” Mr. Vance said. “This is someone who was inciting jihad who had the possibility of affecting the streets of Manhattan.”

But Mr. Faisal’s lawyers portrayed him as a big talker whose actions did not match his violent rhetoric and was swept up in a plan advanced by determined investigators. Detectives posed as militants and flattered Mr. Faisal, calling him “very smart” and referring to the United States as the “land of war” to win his trust.

“What the evidence will not show is that Mr. Faisal committed an actual act of terrorism,” said Alex Grosshertn, one of his lawyers, during opening statements.

Police Department officials did not respond to a request to discuss Mr. Faisal’s case, but the trial, which began in late November in State Supreme Court, reflects the priorities and ambitions of the agency and the district attorney’s office: They have seen Manhattan as a magnet for terrorists and, in initiatives all but unrivaled outside the federal government, assembled special teams to investigate and prosecute extremists.

Critics have said over the years that police intelligence officers — who typically operate in secret, do not wear badges or uniforms, and communicate with other officers only through handlers — have crossed boundaries.

In 2003, constitutional scholars and civil libertarians complained about a practice of [collecting data](#) about the politics of people arrested at antiwar protests. Undercover officers [conducted covert surveillance](#) of people in the United States, Canada and Europe who had planned to demonstrate at the 2004 Republican National Convention in Manhattan. And in 2011, the department came under widespread criticism for spying on Muslims in New York and New Jersey, prompting a federal judge to [tighten rules](#) governing intelligence operations.

“There is a question about the appropriate role of local law enforcement in creating what is essentially a shadow C.I.A.,” said Alex S. Vitale, a sociology professor at Brooklyn College who studies policing. He added that the question was particularly acute when the police are engaged in “international hunts that use up resources that the city could be using to address its own problems.”

Federal prosecutors have often been reluctant to take on terrorism cases based upon evidence gathered by the local police without the involvement of federal agencies or Joint Terrorism Task Forces, which were established to coordinate efforts, said Ali Soufan, a former F.B.I. agent who supervised international terrorism cases.

He said federal prosecutors may not have believed the Faisal investigation met their rigorous thresholds. (When Mr. Faisal was arrested, former and current law enforcement officials [suggested](#) that his helpful ties to a foreign government had made federal prosecutors hesitant to build a case against him.)

The current district attorney, Alvin L. Bragg, said in a statement that his office is well prepared, maintaining a counterterrorism program “staffed with talented attorneys and analysts who have deep expertise prosecuting complex cases that span borders.”

“New Yorkers know the horrors of terrorism, and Manhattan remains a unique target for both global and domestic terror plots,” he said.

Eugene O’Donnell, a former police officer and prosecutor who teaches at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said the New York Police Department, the nation’s largest, is positioned to handle such investigations effectively, in part because it has a large, ethnically diverse and “street savvy” pool of employees.

Testimony and records of email and text exchanges introduced into evidence provide an unusual glimpse into an Intelligence Bureau investigation that lasted nearly a year, during which city detectives inhabited fictional personas, adopted the language of terror and traveled to the Mideast.

In early 2016, a detective, Ilter Aykac, sent an email to Mr. Faisal, claiming to be a 24-year-old Turkish-American woman named Rojin Ahmed.

“I told him that I was a struggling female,” Mr. Aykac, now retired from the Police Department, testified last month. “I told him I needed help and advice.”

Posing as Rojin, Mr. Aykac sent flattering messages to Mr. Faisal, calling him “very busy and important,” according to evidence, and saying that there were “lots of kuffars in new York,” using a derogatory name for nonbelievers.

Mr. Faisal suggested that Rojin should consider marrying his stepson, Hannibal Kokayi, who lived in Washington, D.C., writing in a text message introduced as evidence that “hijra is on his mind” — using a term that prosecutors said meant traveling to join ISIS.

But Mr. Faisal’s wife, Nzingha Kokayi, told Rojin, “u lost trust” for asking her son “about plans outside of US,” adding: “Ppl get arrested everyday for discussing this topic.” Ms. Kokayi also asked: “Why do u refuse to skype or send a picture?”

The next day, a female detective who testified as Undercover 487, took over the role of Rojin from Mr. Aykac. She appeased Ms. Kokayi on a video call that was shown to the jury. Then, prosecutors said, she met with Mr. Kokayi in New York and Washington.

In late 2016, Undercover 487 told Mr. Faisal that she was in Jordan, according to records of a Skype call entered into evidence. Less than an hour later, evidence shows, Mr. Faisal texted her the phone number of an ISIS fighter in Raqqa, Syria.

The evidence also shows that Mr. Faisal agreed that someone whom Undercover 487 described as a “Pakistani sister” named Mavish could contact him.

So the New York Police Department deployed a third detective, a woman in her 20s who was born in Pakistan and testified as Undercover 716. She posed as a former medical student from New York who was working as a “patient transporter” in a hospital and could help treat injured ISIS fighters. In late 2016, evidence shows, she told Mr. Faisal by text message that she planned to “leave work for good,” adding that it was “for hijrah.”

“We will plan together,” Mr. Faisal wrote back, the records show, and the two communicated for weeks, with Mavish saying she wanted a husband who shared the “same beliefs.” Mr. Faisal first tried to convince Mavish to marry him, then asked if she would be willing to marry a Somali man in Canada or a Pakistani man in Britain.

Mr. Faisal had been apprehensive about communicating with someone in the United States, believing those exchanges could be monitored, Undercover 716 testified. So in early 2017, the New York detective flew to Abu Dhabi.

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| | <p>She sent him a selfie in front of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque there, telling him she needed to find a way into ISIS territory. The department's investigation then extended further: Mr. Faisal sent her a phone number for a fighter in Syria named Luqmaan Patel, records show.</p> <p>Mr. Patel quizzed her on her background, Undercover 716 said, asking whether she had ever been married and how much she weighed. He asked, in text messages introduced as evidence, "Are you sure you want to come right NOW?!" and "Are you having doubts?" He then added in a voice mail message that he was in an area with heavy fighting. Undercover 716 replied, "I am not having any doubts."</p> <p>Text messages show Mr. Patel wrote that he would help Mavish and asked whether she wanted to marry him. She said yes and he later wrote, "I eagerly await you lol."</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Extremists storm Somalia capital govt office |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/extremists-storm-government-office-somalias-capital-96592886 |
| GIST | <p>MOGADISHU, Somalia -- Somalia's government says five civilians were killed when al-Qaida-linked extremists stormed a regional government office in the capital on Sunday.</p> <p>The founder of the Aamin ambulance service, Abdulkadir Adan, told The Associated Press his team collected 16 wounded people from the scene.</p> <p>The al-Shabab extremist group claimed responsibility for the assault on the Banadir Regional Administration headquarters in Mogadishu.</p> <p>A staff member at the headquarters said the attack began with a suicide bombing before gunmen entered and exchanged fire with security guards. The staffer, Mustafa Abdulle, said most of the workers were rescued by security forces.</p> <p>Al-Shabab often carries out attacks in Mogadishu. The federal government last year declared "total war" on the extremist group and has retaken a number of communities the fighters had controlled in central and southern Somalia.</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Teen admits terror attack plot in London |
| SOURCE | https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/teenager-admits-planning-terrorist-attack-in-london/ |
| GIST | <p>A teenager has admitted to planning a terrorist attack in London – before being arrested by officers from the Metropolitan Police's (Met) Counter Terrorism Command.</p> <p>Matthew King, 19, of Essex was arrested by Counter Terrorism officers as part of a proactive operation in May 2022. Enquiries subsequently found that he had planned an attack targeting police officers and a member of the armed forces.</p> <p>He had also carried out hostile reconnaissance at several locations over several months and had discussed committing a mass casualty attack on members of the public.</p> <p>King appeared at the Old Bailey today on January 20 and pleaded guilty to preparation of terrorist acts (contrary to Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2000). He will be sentenced on April 14 at the same court.</p> <p>Commander Richard Smith, who leads the Met's Counter Terrorism Command, said: "It was not clear when or where King intended to carry out his attack, but he had conducted a significant amount of hostile reconnaissance. In online conversations, he talked about committing an indiscriminate attack on the public. Disturbingly, he also spoke about targeting police officers and army personnel.</p> |

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| | <p>“Concerns about King’s mind-set were reported to police, and it was those reports that led to King being investigated and his attack planning being discovered. This is another case which shows how the round-the-clock efforts of police, with our partners, are keeping the public safe from very real threats. It also shows how important it is for the public to report anyone they think may be vulnerable to radicalisation, or already on that path.”</p> <p>An investigation into King was launched in April 2022 after information was received about concerns over his extreme Islamist mind-set. Further enquiries were carried out and King was arrested at an address in Essex on May 18.</p> <p>While he was held in custody, officers conducted fast-time enquiries and found evidence on his devices of his extremist beliefs, hostile reconnaissance he had carried out at various locations, and conversations about attack planning.</p> <p>He had visited and filmed a London barracks and a police station, as well as recording officers at train stations, and outside a criminal court.</p> <p>Enquiries found that he had taken steps to obtain a knife online, and he also planned to travel abroad to join Daesh.</p> |
| Return to Top | Read more at the Metropolitan Police |

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Danger of media echo chamber extremism |
| SOURCE | https://www.wired.com/story/media-echo-chamber-extremism/ |
| GIST | <p>ONE OF THE top concerns when it comes to the harms of social media and political polarization in the United States is the fear of echo chambers or people operating in media bubbles. If people are only hearing opinions they already agree with or seeing stories that align with their worldview, they may become more entrenched in their beliefs, whether or not their beliefs reflect the real world. They may also become easier to manipulate and more extreme.</p> <p>Interestingly, research largely shows the vast majority of people don’t inhabit perfectly sealed-off echo chambers. It’s been found that only about 4 percent of people operate in online echo chambers, and most people on Twitter, for example, don’t follow any political accounts. Essentially, most people aren’t following politics, and a lot of people who do are getting at least a little bit of information from different sides of the political spectrum. That said, echo chambers and media bubbles are an issue because they can radicalize people, negatively affect the people who inhabit them, and distort the broader political landscape.</p> <p>“The subset of the population that does consume hyper-partisan media and inhabit echo chambers on social platforms is very consequential,” says Magdalena Wojcieszak, a professor of communication at the University of California, Davis. “They’re more politically interested, more participatory, more strongly partisan, and more polarized. Because of all these things, they’re more likely to take part in politics.”</p> <p>Wojcieszak says because these people are so politically involved, they have a disproportionate influence on American politics. They’re often the loudest voices in the room. She says people who are politically active like to have their views confirmed, so they can end up following accounts that align with their views and end up in echo chambers. Social media makes it easier to find people who align with them politically, and algorithms often feed them the content they’re going to like. All of this can ultimately lead to people going down rabbit holes and becoming more politically extreme.</p> <p>“It makes you more extreme or polarized. It reinforces your attitudes. It also reinforces your sense of belonging to this group, and it reinforces your negativity and hostility toward other groups,” Wojcieszak says. “You think you’re the legitimate one, the good one, the virtuous one. The others are evil.”</p> <p>People can start to believe they’re the only ones with the facts and that the other side is illegitimate. (Perhaps you’ve seen this in a person who paid tens of billions of dollars for a social media company not</p> |

long ago.) Wojcieszak says the process of people becoming radicalized can start with them having just a few political views in common with those who are more extreme than they are. Having a few stances that align with these extreme actors online can be the snare that pulls them into the rabbit hole.

“In order to enter that process of this individual psychological and algorithmic confirmation, you do need to have some extent of susceptibility to some sort of narratives from the left or the right,” Wojcieszak says. “If there are some social or political issues in which you have some views, that can start the process.”

You can imagine someone who isn’t particularly politically extreme but does harbor certain fears about ways the country is changing being pulled in by extremists and becoming extreme themselves as they get increasingly embedded in that community. People need community, and extremists can give them that. They’ll be welcomed by this community, Wojcieszak says, and they’ll feel the psychological need to start going along with whatever that community’s narrative is on any number of issues.

Mike Gruszczynski, an assistant professor of communication science at Indiana University, says a distrust in institutions, such as news media and the government, can lead to people creating echo chambers and often falling for disinformation because it appeals to their political beliefs. He says this has been found to be more common on the political right than the political left.

“You have a lot of people on the right wing of the political spectrum who have been highly distrustful of traditional journalism for quite a while,” Gruszczynski says. “Not only are they distrustful of it, but they exist in a kind of feedback loop where their chosen leaders tell them that the things that come out of the media are false or biased.”

One of the ways society can help prevent people from going down these rabbit holes and becoming more extreme is by teaching them media literacy. Gruszczynski says it won’t necessarily be easy to do, especially because there’s so much disinformation out there and it’s often quite convincing. But it’d be worth the effort. “Everyone kind of has to be their own detective in a way now,” Gruszczynski says.

It often feels like an insurmountable challenge, Wojcieszak says, because those who have become politically extreme are living in such a different reality than the rest of the populace. If someone is spending most of their time on extremist forums or in extreme groups on social media, for example, it’s hard to reach them and bring them back to reality. She says improving social media algorithms so these platforms are less likely to make people more extreme in the first place could be a good place to start when it comes to attacking this problem.

“In the US, things have gotten so deeply bad for some groups. The people who are, say, true Trump believers or who are convinced Covid was a hoax—I’m not sure if you can deprogram them,” Wojcieszak says.

Society may not be able to pull everyone out of these rabbit holes, but increased media literacy and social media platforms that aren’t designed to confirm people’s existing beliefs and make them more extreme could help fewer people become radicalized. It’s a widespread problem that will take time to address, but the status quo does not seem sustainable.

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/21 Court: Canada must repatriate 4 from Syria |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/21/canada-court-isis-syria-repatriation/ |
| GIST | <p>The Canadian government must work to bring home four Canadian men detained in Syria, a judge has ruled, a victory for families who say Canada has violated their relatives’ rights by leaving them in squalid prisons and camps there for years.</p> <p>Justice Henry Brown of the federal court in Ottawa ordered the Canadian government Friday to provide the men with emergency travel documents and to put in a request to Kurdish authorities — who oversee the detention centers — to repatriate them.</p> |

The men are among tens of thousands of foreign nationals held by Kurdish authorities for allegedly having ties to the Islamic State. They continue to languish in Kurdish-controlled northeast Syria, more than three years after U.S.-backed Kurdish forces declared military victory over the extremist group. The prisons and camps where alleged former Islamic State fighters, their wives and children have been held are overcrowded and unsanitary, and [plagued by violence](#) and disease. Rights groups [say](#) the conditions are life-threatening.

Kurdish authorities and detainees' relatives have implored governments to accept their citizens back. Citing security concerns, many countries have dragged their feet — or in some cases, revoked detainees' citizenship.

Since 2019, 36 countries have repatriated at least some of their nationals from northeast Syria, according to Letta Tayler, associate director in the crisis and conflict division of Human Rights Watch. Canada brought home its first returnee — a 5-year-old orphan — in October 2020. Ottawa has since repatriated at least five more, but more than 40 Canadian nationals remain in detention in Syria.

Courts in Germany and the Netherlands have ordered governments to repatriate women and children. But the Canadian ruling Friday is “potentially groundbreaking,” Tayler said.

“This is the first court case that I am aware of in which a court has ruled — and robustly — in favor of repatriations of men,” she said. “This is a major crack in the wall of resistance by countries that prefer to outsource responsibility for their nationals to a nonstate actor inside a war zone.”

In the case, family members of 23 detained Canadians argued the government's refusal to facilitate their relatives' return violated Canada's constitution.

The court order comes after Canadian authorities reached a deal Thursday to repatriate six women and 13 children who were part of the case, Lawrence Greenspon, a lawyer representing the families, said. The government had previously sent letters to the women informing them that they and their children may be eligible for assistance based on the worsening environments in Al-Hol and Roj, the open-air camps where women and children are being held.

The identities of most of the detainees and their relatives have been kept under wraps due to the sensitivity of the case. Greenspon said the family members he is representing are “overjoyed” at the agreement and ruling.

The court judgment “reaffirms the principle that if a Canadian has their constitutional rights being violated, no matter where they are in the world, and the Canadian government has the ability to do something about it, then they should,” Greenspon said.

In his decision, Brown cited “dire” prison conditions and the fact that the men have not been charged or brought to trial.

The men are being held in prisons separate from the women and children. One appears to have been crammed with as many as 30 other men in a cell built for six and alleged he had been tortured, Brown wrote. There is “overwhelming evidence” that the male prisoners lack sufficient food and medical attention, he added.

Life in the detention centers grew more dangerous in recent months after Turkey began a bombing campaign on Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria.

Greenspon said only one of the men has been in contact recently. “With respect to the other three, we don't have even proof of life that's recent,” he said. “We're hopeful that it's not too late to repatriate them.”

Among the men is Jack Letts, who was born and raised in England and traveled to Syria in 2014 at age 18. He allegedly joined the Islamic State and became known as “Jihadi Jack” in British media. Kurdish forces confirmed his capture in 2017.

His Canadian father, John Letts, and British mother, Sally Lane, say he is innocent. A British court convicted both in June of funding terrorism by sending money to their son to help him escape from Syria.

Lane and John Letts have waged a well-publicized campaign in the United Kingdom and Canada to extract their son from Syria. But in 2019, the British government revoked his citizenship, leaving him with only Canadian nationality.

Canadian officials accused Britain of passing the buck. Conservatives, fighting a tough election campaign that year, said they would refuse to help Letts. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau largely dodged the question, though he promised to prosecute people who participated in terrorist activities.

Shortly after Trudeau was elected in 2015, his Liberal Party repealed a law passed by Conservatives that allowed the government to strip the citizenship of dual nationals convicted of terrorism-related offenses in Canadian courts.

“A Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian,” he had said during his campaign. “And you devalue the citizenship of every Canadian in this place and in this country when you break down and make it conditional for everyone.”

But his government has stalled on repatriating its citizens stuck in northeast Syria.

“We are over the moon at this news, which means we will finally get to see our son again after 9 long years,” Lane wrote in a text message after the ruling. “The judge recognized the appalling way the Canadian [government] has behaved over the treatment of its citizens and made the decision on human rights grounds. He has said repatriation needs to happen ‘as soon as possible’ so we will be holding the government to this.”

Some officials and legal experts worry authorities might not be able to detain returnees, and that they could radicalize others or carry out attacks in Canada.

Rights groups argue Canada’s law enforcement and judicial system is well equipped to keep tabs on returnees and prosecute adults.

For the detainees in this case, much depends on the government’s speed in issuing identity documents and working out travel logistics, Tayler said. Canada could seek help from the United States, which has stepped up efforts in recent months to persuade and assist other countries to repatriate their nationals, she added.

“We take note of the Federal Court’s decision,” Grantly Franklin, spokesperson for Global Affairs Canada, said in a statement Saturday. “We are currently reviewing the decision and will have more to say in due course. The safety and security of Canadians is our government’s top priority. We remain committed to taking a robust approach to this issue.”

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Kidnapped women Burkina Faso freed |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/20/world/africa/women-kidnapped-burkina-faso.html |
| GIST | <p>DAKAR, Senegal — More than 60 women and girls who had been abducted last week in the West African nation of Burkina Faso were freed on Friday, the national broadcaster said.</p> <p>The kidnappings took place outside two villages near the northern city of Arbinda as the women were foraging for wild fruits and leaves. But on Friday, the television channel RTB said that the 62 women and girls, as well as four babies, had been found and taken to Ouagadougou, the capital.</p> |

The broadcaster played footage of a group of women sitting on the ground, some clutching buckets and jerrycans, while military officers wearing fatigues stood around them. Thirty-nine of them were younger than 18, the report said.

Burkina Faso, a landlocked country that once prided itself on its people's tolerance for difference, has been overrun by extremist groups loosely affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State that have spread in recent years from neighboring Mali, where they made incursions about a decade ago.

Those jihadist groups have gained footholds in Burkina Faso's north and east, killing thousands and displacing two million people — about 10 percent of the country's population, according to the United Nations and humanitarian agencies.

The country's troubles have sometimes been compounded by its armed forces, which have [carried out extrajudicial killings](#) in villages where residents were suspected of supporting the jihadists, and by armed vigilante groups that have sprung up to defend communities but have little training and often also kill with impunity.

In the country's north, where the women were abducted, the jihadist groups have prevented trucks carrying food from using roads, forcing residents to venture farther out to get supplies to avoid going hungry.

Armed militants kidnapped the women, girls and babies in two separate groups on Thursday and Friday last week, according to the government, which said in a statement on Monday that about 50 women had been abducted. The news of their release on Friday suggested that the number of victims might have been higher than originally stated.

It was also unclear Friday night if all of the women and girls had been rescued, or if some had been killed. The military provided no details about how the women and children had been released.

Despite having lost vast swaths of territory to extremist groups, members of Burkina Faso's army ousted the country's democratically elected president a year ago, blaming him for not doing enough to stabilize the country. Then, eight months later, a captain carried out another coup, arguing again that the country's military leader had weakened its security.

That captain, Ibrahim Traoré, became the country's new leader and made it his priority to recover territories lost to armed groups. But the government controls only about half of the country, according to estimates by research groups and regional leaders.

Nearly one million people live in blockaded areas in the country's north and east, according to the United Nations. Convoys escorted by the military sometimes bring supplies, often at great risk.

In August 2021, 80 people, including 65 civilians, were killed in an attack on a convoy taking them to Arbinda. Dozens of civilians were killed in a similar operation in the region last September.

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 TSA investigates exposure 'no fly' list data |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/20/politics/tsa-no-fly-list-data-cybersecurity/index.html |
| GIST | CNN — The Transportation Security Administration said it was investigating a “potential cybersecurity incident” after a hacker claimed to access an older version of the agency’s no-fly list of known or suspected terrorists. |

“TSA is aware of a potential cybersecurity incident, and we are investigating in coordination with our federal partners,” TSA said in a statement to CNN.

The data was sitting on the public internet in an unsecured computer server hosted by CommuteAir, a regional airline based in Ohio, according to the hacker claiming the discovery.

The hacker, who also describes herself as a cybersecurity researcher, told CNN she notified CommuteAir of the data exposure.

CommuteAir said in a statement that the data accessed by the hacker was “an outdated 2019 version of the federal no-fly list” that included names and birthdates.

CommuteAir, which exclusively operates 50-seat regional flights for United Airlines from Washington Dulles, Houston and Denver hubs, said it took the affected computer server offline after a “member of the security research community” had contacted the airline.

The no-fly list is a set of known, or suspected, terrorists, who are barred from flying to or in the US. The screening program grew out of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and involves airlines comparing their passenger records with federal data to keep dangerous people off planes.

The Daily Dot, a tech news outlet, first reported on the alleged data breach.

In a memo to current and former CommuteAir employees obtained by CNN, the airline said it discovered a data breach in November in which an “unauthorized party” also accessed personal information held by the airline, including names, birthdays and the last four digits of Social Security numbers.

“We are ... working closely with law enforcement to ensure the incident is properly addressed,” CommuteAir said in the memo.

The hacker and security researcher claiming to have accessed the no-fly list data says she is 23 years old and based in Switzerland.

“It should never be this easy to just completely (breach) an entire airline,” the hacker, who goes by the name maia arson crimew, told CNN. She shared samples of the data to support her claim. The list included names of known or suspected terrorists and their birthdays, including that of convicted Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, whom the Biden administration recently sent back to Russia in a prisoner exchange for WNBA star Brittney Griner.

The Swiss hacker says she used to go by the name Tillie Kottmann. A person by that name was indicted by a US grand jury in 2021 for allegedly being part of a conspiracy that hacked dozens of companies and government organizations and posted stolen data online.

The hacker has often claimed to be exposing overly broad surveillance programs. She was allegedly part of a group of hackers that breached US security camera maker Verkada in 2021 and reportedly accessed live feeds of thousands of the company’s cameras in hospitals and prisons.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Surveillance program captures \$\$ transfers |
| SOURCE | https://www.wired.com/story/trac-money-transfer-surveillance-security-roundup/#intcid=wired-verso-hp-trending_a912c307-4189-4ce7-8de8-435b1806a13d_popular4-1 |
| GIST | Hundreds of law enforcement agencies in the United States have access to a little-known database of 150 million money transfers sent between the US, Mexico, and 22 other regions, according to a report this week by <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> . The database, maintained by the nonprofit Transaction Record Analysis Center (TRAC), provides over 600 local and federal law enforcement agencies with warrantless access to |

the “full names of the sender and recipient” and the amounts of money transfers made through services like Western Union, MoneyGram, and Viamericas.

According to the report, the program was created to assist government agencies in gathering evidence of financial crimes such as fraud and money laundering. However, it has raised concerns among privacy advocates as it allows bulk access to data on money transfers, which are not as heavily regulated as traditional banking transactions.

“Ordinary people’s private financial records are being siphoned indiscriminately into a massive database, with access given to virtually any cop who wants it,” Nathan Freed Wessler, deputy director of the ACLU’s Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, told the *WSJ*. “This program should never have been launched, and it must be shut down now.”

WASHINGTON—Hundreds of federal, state and local U.S. [law-enforcement agencies](#) have access without court oversight to a database of more than 150 million [money transfers](#) between people in the U.S. and in more than 20 countries, according to internal program documents and an investigation by Sen. Ron Wyden.

The database, housed at a little-known nonprofit called the Transaction Record Analysis Center, or TRAC, was set up by the Arizona state attorney general’s office in 2014 as part of a settlement reached with [Western Union](#) to combat [cross-border trafficking of drugs](#) and people from Mexico. It has since expanded to allow officials of more than 600 law-enforcement entities—from federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement to small-town police departments in nearly every state—to monitor the flow of funds through money services between the U.S. and countries around the world.

TRAC’s data includes the full names of the sender and recipient as well as the transaction amount. Rich Lebel, TRAC’s director, said the program has directly resulted in hundreds of leads and busts [involving drug cartels](#) and other criminals seeking to launder money, and has revealed patterns of money flow that help law-enforcement agencies get a broader grasp on smuggling networks.

“It’s a law-enforcement investigative tool,” Mr. Lebel said. “We don’t broadcast it to the world, but we don’t run from or hide from it either.”

After this article was published, a spokesman for the Arizona attorney general said: “Courts have held that customers using money transmitter businesses do not have the same expectation of privacy as traditional banking customers.”

Mr. Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said TRAC allows the government to “serve itself an all-you-can-eat buffet of Americans’ personal financial data while bypassing the normal protections for Americans’ privacy.”

Internal records, including TRAC meeting minutes and copies of 140 subpoenas from the Arizona attorney general, were obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union and reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. They show that any authorized law-enforcement agency can query the data without a warrant to examine the transactions of people inside the U.S. for evidence of [money laundering](#) and other crimes. One slideshow prepared by a TRAC investigator showed how the program’s data could be used to scan for categories such as “Middle Eastern/Arabic names” in bulk transaction records.

“Ordinary people’s private financial records are being siphoned indiscriminately into a massive database, with access given to virtually any cop who wants it,” Nathan Freed Wessler, deputy director of the ACLU’s Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, said. “This program should never have been launched, and it must be shut down now.”

To obtain material such as bank records or emails, law enforcement typically needs to show that documents are relevant to an investigation and secure them through a subpoena or a warrant.

TRAC captures money transfers occurring through companies such as Western Union, [MoneyGram](#), DolEx and [Euronet](#) through its Ria brand. These services are used by millions of people—especially those without bank accounts—to transfer funds between friends and family. They are an especially popular way for Mexican migrants to remit money earned in the U.S. to family members across the border.

Money-services companies are more loosely regulated than banks, often at the state level. Under federal regulations, banks must monitor transactions for suspicious activity, report those over \$10,000 in cash and conduct due diligence on customers. Congress also requires federal agencies to get a subpoena for bank records and notify customers when their records are being seized.

Money-services companies have drawn scrutiny from law enforcement over the years because of concerns about terrorist financing, drug smuggling and other illicit activities. Customers using money-services companies such as Western Union and MoneyGram aren't told that their transactions will be available to government entities.

Mr. Lebel said that because money-services companies don't have the same know-your-customer rules as banks, bulk data needs to be captured to discern patterns of fraud and money laundering. He said TRAC put a \$500 minimum threshold in place to avoid collecting the overwhelming majority of family remittances back to Mexico and other countries, which typically fall below that threshold.

Mr. Wyden determined last year that the [federal government participated](#) in TRAC, and specifically that Homeland Security Investigations, an arm of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, used customs summonses, a type of subpoena, to collect about six million records of money transfers from Western Union and Maxitransfers since 2019. All those records ended up stored in the TRAC system, Mr. Wyden said.

"The scope of this surveillance program and federal agencies' role is far greater than initially revealed," Mr. Wyden said this week in a letter asking the Justice Department inspector general to investigate the FBI and DEA's relationship with the program.

The Department of Homeland Security watchdog informed Mr. Wyden's office last year that it was reviewing the activities of ICE's investigative arm to combat drug trafficking in response to his questions about TRAC. ICE didn't respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Wyden's office said its continuing investigation had found three money-services companies—MoneyGram, Euronet and Viamericas—sent TRAC bulk tranches of customer data in response to subpoenas issued by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Euronet and Viamericas had received customs summonses from that office seeking data for transactions [between anywhere in the U.S. and countries](#) including many in the Caribbean and Latin America as well as Canada, France, Spain, Ukraine and China, the companies told Mr. Wyden. Those subpoenas ordered the money-services companies to turn the data over to TRAC.

Euronet said the demands came in 2021 for data back to 2019; Viamericas said data disclosures were ongoing but declined to specify dates. MoneyGram said the ICE office had demanded data between 2019 and 2021 about transactions from 21 U.S. states to Colombia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

MoneyGram said it doesn't voluntarily share data about transfers with third parties except when required by law and that it "responded to subpoenas that it received under the TRAC program in the same manner as it responds to any other valid subpoena."

Euronet said the subpoenas at issue were subject to ongoing litigation and declined to comment further. Viameerica said it was committed to consumer privacy and adhering to compliance obligations. DoJEx didn't respond to requests for comment.

On the web portal to the TRAC database, publicly available online, a sign-up page states that TRAC is "a law enforcement-only site" and warns visitors that their requests for access will be denied if they aren't in law enforcement and don't provide an active government email address.

Mr. Lebel said TRAC has never identified a case in which a law-enforcement official has accessed data improperly or the database has been breached by outsiders. The program has seen an increase in use in recent years because of the [surging opioid crisis in the U.S.](#), he said.

Law-enforcement agencies use TRAC's data to establish patterns in the flow of funds suspected of being linked to criminal activity, Mr. Lebel said, and the more comprehensive the data, the better the analysis. TRAC manages data that law enforcement provides, he said, and what it is receiving and storing is often in flux.

While declining to discuss TRAC's funding, Mr. Lebel said the nonprofit was originally stood up with money from the Western Union settlement that has since been exhausted. Mr. Wyden and others have said TRAC is federally funded.

Many of the subpoenas through which TRAC acquires data are drafted broadly, often requiring the money-transfer companies to turn over data on all transactions between certain places above the \$500 threshold, the documents show.

Even wholly domestic money transfers are captured in TRAC's database—such as when an American living in a border state sends or receives \$500 or more from another American living elsewhere in the country. Surveillance programs that capture fully domestic records get heightened scrutiny from courts because of the privacy issues they raise.

U.S. courts have rarely blessed bulk law-enforcement collection of records for ordinary criminal activities—usually requiring criminal investigations to be narrowly targeted at individuals, not entire populations. Intelligence agencies operate under different rules, but Mr. Lebel said TRAC has denied requests from intelligence agencies and the defense industry for access to the data.

Privacy advocates have long argued against collecting records in bulk, saying that approach is ineffective and runs afoul of constitutional and statutory privacy expectations.

Western Union, the largest and oldest money-transfer company in the U.S., tried to fight a bulk subpoena for its customer records. In 2006, at the dawn of the Arizona attorney general's interest in acquiring this data, the company challenged a state subpoena that demanded that Western Union produce all transaction records between Arizona and the Mexican state of Sonora. At the time, Arizona was concerned about sophisticated criminal enterprises using the company to launder money. An Arizona appeals court ruled that bulk subpoenas to Western Union were overly broad under Arizona law.

Despite prevailing in court, Western Union later found itself part of an investigation by the Arizona attorney general into whether its services facilitated money laundering. In a \$94 million settlement that resolved differences between Arizona and the company in 2010, Western Union agreed to give over the transaction data that the Arizona attorney general requested and help fund more effective law-enforcement measures against money laundering. A few years later, the settlement was modified to house the transaction records in a nonprofit organization and TRAC was born.

Even though the appeals court ruled that asking for large numbers of transaction records was overbroad, state officials continued to send subpoenas to more than a dozen other money-transfer companies. No such company except Western Union challenged the subpoenas in court.

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| | <p>Following publication of this article, Oscar Herasme, a lawyer who said he worked with the Arizona attorney general's office in 2008 to help establish what later became TRAC, said he was surprised to learn that it had "metamorphosed" into something not originally contemplated.</p> <p>"It was never the intent of the parties I worked with to summarily allow for the sharing of personal financial data of individuals with law enforcement," Mr. Herasme said. "Wholesale access to customer data...runs counter to the expectation of privacy afforded to financial service consumers."</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Worst avian flu outbreak in US history |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/worst-avian-flu-in-u-s-history-is-hitting-poultry-wild-birds-even-bears-11674366891?mod=hp_lead_pos11 |
| GIST | <p>Nearly a year after it began, the worst avian-influenza outbreak in U.S. history is continuing to decimate poultry flocks across the Midwest and Colorado, frustrating efforts to keep the virus from affecting the nation's egg prices and supply.</p> <p>In South Dakota, the highly contagious bird flu, typically transmitted by the feces, mucus and saliva of wild birds, first hit commercial poultry farms in March 2022 and has continued to affect flocks. Within the last month, egg-laying hens and turkeys at several local farms were infected, leading to the deaths of more than 1.3 million poultry over that period, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data. Nearly four million poultry have died in the state since the start of the outbreak.</p> <p>Nebraska, where more than 4.8 million poultry died during a 2015 bird-flu outbreak, has surpassed 6.7 million poultry deaths from the current outbreak, according to state and federal data.</p> <p>Colorado has lost more than 90% of its table egg-laying hens, while also seeing its population of wild birds including snow geese, raptors, hawks and eagles sickened, state officials said.</p> <p>"One of the challenges is that we don't know why it has been able to thrive for so long. We're almost a full year into this outbreak and it is ongoing," said Maggie Baldwin, Colorado's state veterinarian.</p> <p>Some 6.25 million poultry in Colorado have died so far.</p> <p>People working on the problem say there is no easy way to stop the spread of bird flu. Instead, the virus must be allowed to run its course.</p> <p>"There is no historical context for this. It's like when Covid hit for humans," said Mike Tincher, rehabilitation coordinator for Colorado's Rocky Mountain Raptor Program.</p> <p>To keep bird flu from spreading, entire poultry flocks must be destroyed after an infection is confirmed. The outbreak has caused the deaths of nearly 58 million poultry in 47 states, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data.</p> <p>While it rarely affects humans, the disease is mostly fatal for domestic birds. It can also infect other animals. On Tuesday, Montana wildlife officials said three young grizzly bears had contracted bird flu during the fall and were euthanized, the first known cases of grizzlies getting the disease. The bears likely contracted the virus from eating infected birds, according to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks veterinarian Jennifer Ramsey.</p> <p>One facility in Colorado's Weld County that had restocked with healthy hens after initially having to euthanize its flock because of the virus was struck again by an outbreak last month, said Bill Scebbi, executive director of the Colorado Egg Producers, which represents five family farms. The facility had to euthanize its new flock, Mr. Scebbi said.</p> |

He said the flu has been destructive to Colorado's egg industry, with farmers having to purchase eggs from out of state to meet customer demand. Egg farmers aren't insured against the virus, Mr. Scebbi said, and estimated losses are in the millions.

"It's been devastating to their businesses, to their farms and personally devastating to their livelihoods," he said.

Still, according to Emily Metz, president and chief executive of the American Egg Board, which represents egg producers, many farms around the country are recovering from the outbreak. There are currently about 6% fewer hens laying eggs than normal nationwide, she said.

According to the group, egg producers have developed better biosecurity measures since the 2015 outbreak—such as securing areas to keep wild birds away and keeping equipment clean—which can help keep the virus from spreading from farm to farm.

Wholesale prices of Midwest large eggs hit a record \$5.46 a dozen in December, according to the research firm Urner Barry. Prices have fallen back to \$3.77 a dozen this month after the seasonal demand of the holiday baking season.

In addition to the millions of poultry at farms that have been killed, many wild birds have been infected as well, officials said.

Jim Gammonley, who supervises the avian research program for the Colorado Parks and Wildlife division, said the state has experienced die-offs of snow geese in the thousands due to the virus.

The die-offs have typically occurred in and around reservoirs where the snow geese like to roost at night, he said. In one case, field staff were called to a reservoir just before Thanksgiving where they found about 1,000 dead geese, which they retrieved. The next day, the employees returned to check on the reservoir and found another 1,000 dead geese, Mr. Gammonley said.

Mr. Tinchler said his group had located 37 raptors that had tested positive for the virus and referred another 19 to state officials for testing. Such animals typically get the virus by feeding off diseased geese and ducks.

"We've never seen this before. And it's just not slowing down," he said.

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Ageing planet: new demographic timebomb |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/22/ageing-planet-the-new-demographic-timebomb |
| GIST | <p>In Japan even criminals are getting old. In the country's notorious yakuza crime syndicates, more than half of members are now over 50, according to the national police agency.</p> <p>Veterans who have passed 70 outnumber those in their 20s by two to one, even though younger men are the groups' traditional source of "muscle".</p> <p>Japan is a pioneer in adjusting to the skewed demographics of an ageing society, with the impact of its low birthrates exacerbated by a fierce resistance to immigration. But its dilemmas are increasingly shared around the world.</p> <p>India may be on the brink of becoming the world's most populous country, with more than 200 million new citizens expected to be born in the next two decades. But in some parts of its more prosperous south, it is already greying.</p> <p>In the coastal state of Kerala, just 5.1% of the population was over 60 in 1961, below the national average. By 2025, it is expected to be one in five, with a corresponding drain on the state's finances.</p> |

As it struggles with an increasing number of destitute elderly, the government is planning to give the state new powers to seize property that parents had handed over to their children, if the older generation is not being well cared for, and return it.

Policymakers are also grappling with how to reverse a grim trend that has turned Kerala into a destination for families who travel from parts of the country even less prepared for a greying population, to abandon sick elderly relatives; a scheme called “Prathyasa” (Hope) aims to send back them to their home states.

The challenges facing Kerala and Japan are increasingly common across much of the world, where families are getting smaller, and people are living longer.

Falling fertility and falling mortality combine to speed up overall ageing of a population. By the middle of the century, a majority of countries still enjoying the demographic dividend of youth will be in sub-Saharan Africa, UN figures show.

Elsewhere, across Asia, [Europe](#) and Latin America, governments will need to support fast-rising numbers of old and vulnerable citizens. Very few countries have started making the social, political and physical changes needed, even though it is not a challenge that has crept up on politicians.

Demographic changes play out in slow motion. Data on birthrates give governments and scientists decades of warning about how their population will shift, barring major catastrophes such as war.

“Purposeful planning would work better than after-the-fact patchwork,” said Eileen Crimmins, chair of the University of Southern California, Leonard Davis school of gerontology.

Yet finding money to pay for the care of older people involves reallocating resources, which is usually painful – whether it is the Keralan approach of ring-fencing older people’s assets, or efforts by western governments to keep people working for longer.

In France last week, workers took to the streets in strikes and protest over government plans to raise the pension age by two years, to 64.

For all the deep anger, that is still younger than the retirement age in the UK and the US, where officials had already pushed back the age at which people can stop work.

“The French situation appears to be an example of making things difficult for yourself,” said Crimmins. The policy change was hitting people already gearing up for retirement, who felt the personal impact on their life plans, she said.

“In the US (which is certainly not an example of good policy), the retirement age for baby boomers was raised in the mid 1980s when none of them cared a bit about retirement, and were not looking. Now people are surprised that it is not 65 when they get there.”

When pensions were first introduced in the 19th century, making it to your 60th birthday was statistically equivalent to making it past 100 today, says Sarah Harper, professor of gerontology at the University of Oxford.

Limited changes to pension age have not kept pace with that rapid increase in life expectancy, even in places stricter than France. Many lucky baby boomers in the UK and US with generous pensions based on their final salary have enjoyed decades of leisured retirement and good health.

A handful of the most fortunate could spend their entire careers with one company, retire early, live into their 90s and thus spend more years on the HR pension roll than they did on the pay roll.

Even today, longer lives and the prospect of early retirement could mean decades as a pensioner. A shrinking number of young workers cannot keep a growing pool of older retirees financially afloat.

“We live in a society where we are saying to young people, ‘stay in education to your mid-20s, you can retire (early) in your mid-50s, and you may well live well into your 90s’. So that’s only a third of your life being active and contributory and that clearly doesn’t make sense in the modern world,” Harper said. “We are all going to have to work longer.”

That may not be unwelcome for everyone. Recent research across 20 countries showed that “many older people actually don’t want to retire completely”, she said, because of the income, fulfilment and status that can come from work.

What they do want and need is more flexibility, often to take on caring roles. One side-effect of an ageing population is the growing number of “grey” carers, older people who look after even older relatives.

In the UK, that includes a surprising number of older men looking after their wives. Although men still die younger than women, anti-smoking campaigns, particularly from the 1980s on, have had a significant impact on the mortality rates from strokes, heart attacks and cancer, Harper said.

Women tend to be frailer than men when they age, so as men survive longer, they are more likely to take on a carer role into their 70s, even though traditionally the majority of care for the elderly – as for children – has been performed by women.

Countries where state provisions of care are weak, or that lack protection for carers trying to work while looking after the very young or very old, may be particularly vulnerable to the impact of an ageing population.

China last week announced its population had fallen for the first time since the 1960s. The quickly growing cohorts of young students and workers had powered decades of economic growth, even as a government worried about overpopulation enforced a punitive, often abusive one-child policy.

Now as growth slows, and the population ages, the government has abruptly switched course and is trying to [encourage more siblings](#).

But preferences shift slowly, and China is one of many places where a misogynist society extracts a heavy penalty on women who become mothers.

Almost universally, when women have access to education and economic opportunities, they choose to have fewer children. If their careers suffer, and they carry a disproportionate burden of childcare, there are likely to be even fewer babies.

“We do know that if you want to raise the fertility rate from say 1.3 up to 1.8 [children per woman], which is the difference between, say, Greece and Scandinavian countries, if you provide good-quality childcare, women will take that leap and have that second or third child,” Harper said.

The difference between whether women on average have one or two children can be the difference between a population that spirals downwards and one that stays relatively stable.

In Japan, the rate is also 1.3, and has shown no sign of budging for years. Decades of [gimmicks](#) and [campaigns](#) have failed to resonate with couples, and the government has belatedly accepted that more financial help may have more impact than [lectures](#) from conservative politicians on a woman’s patriotic duty to give birth.

In his first major policy speech of this year, the prime minister, Fumio Kishida, said he had ordered ministries to work together to take “unprecedented, decisive and bold” measures to tackle the low birthrate, which officials labeled a threat to “the very survival of the nation”.

He has promised a rise in child allowance, an expansion in after-school childcare, and reforms that will make it easier for parents to take leave to raise families – all funded by a promised doubling in spending on children that will be finalised in June.

While they sidestep serious discussion of immigration and a new approach to work-life balance, the national and local governments have put their faith in offers of hard cash, targeting residents of Tokyo and other big cities who complain about the prohibitive costs of bringing up children.

The Tokyo metropolitan government plans an ¥11bn (£70m) programme to make nurseries free for all second-borns, starting in October 2023, which would benefit 50,000 children. It is also considering giving ¥5,000 a month to all under 18s to help with their education costs.

“These are projects the central government should be addressing, but we decided to offer our own support, as there’s not a moment to waste,” the Tokyo governor, Yuriko Koike, said.

Looming over questions of ageing is the role of inequality, between countries and within them. In the UK and the US, being wealthy adds nine healthy years to life expectancy, [recent studies found](#).

Advances in medical science, and the obsession some of the wealthiest in the west have with immortality, may exacerbate these differences further, not only within countries but across borders.

If the wealthy live longer, could the burden on the healthy young get even bigger? For all the alarmist political rhetoric, a shrinking population should not be seen as calamity, any more than fast growth has been.

Discussions of population size have always been an easy trigger for moral panic – whether people think there are too many babies or too few.

British cleric Thomas Malthus gave his name to the theory that growing populations will outpace resources two centuries ago. The fact that he has been proved wrong for many decades, the forecast “tipping points” for social collapse by famine and conflict having never arrived, hasn’t stopped the theories gaining regular traction.

One of the obvious ways of dealing with shifting demographics is encouraging migration. This can lead to a dangerous brain drain – the UK has a red list of countries where it should not recruit health workers, because luring them to Britain devastates local healthcare systems.

But if workers are given rights and training, it can serve as an effective way to shift both capital and expertise from rich areas to poorer ones.

And in a world facing climate catastrophe and a worrying fall in biodiversity, that is a much better way to address the challenges of ageing populations in some areas, than unfettered population growth that is dangerous for both us and the planet.

“We are in transition across the 21st century and need to adjust to this age-structural transition, rather than fight it,” Harper said. “So that every generation, every cohort, more or less replaces itself.”

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Biofoul: dream cruises into nowhere trips |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/20/travel/cruise-delays-biofoul-new-zealand.html |
| GIST | Floating on the Regent Seven Seas Explorer, billed as the “the most luxurious ship ever built.” voyagers wanted for nothing. The drinks flowed. Passengers dined on plates of buttered escargots, then walked them off in circles around each of the cruise liner’s decks. Some passed the time with trivia games or novels, or sat and pondered the view of endless blue ocean from the ship’s infinity pool. |

Beyond these luxuries, all they could have possibly asked for, said Charles Hadlock, one of the 700 or so passengers aboard the ship, was to visit the New Zealand sites that many of them had traveled thousands of miles to see.

“Which, sadly, is not going to happen,” Mr. Hadlock, of Fort Worth, Texas, said in messages sent from the ship.

On Dec. 29, the Explorer departed Sydney for a 14-night, multistop voyage through Australia and New Zealand, with visits to Napier and Rotorua, two cities on New Zealand’s North Island, and Wellington, the capital, on the schedule, as well as days of cruising through the country’s fjords.

Instead, passengers spent two weeks floating at least 16 miles from any land in the ocean on a cruise to nowhere, after the ship was found to have [biofoul](#) — a catchall term for foreign organisms on its exterior — and failed to pass New Zealand’s exacting biosecurity laws.

The ship, along with Cunard’s Queen Elizabeth, the Viking Orion and the Coral Princess, is one of at least six cruise liners traveling in and around New Zealand since December to come into conflict with these regulations, condemning those aboard to days of idleness at sea until a painstaking cleaning process, performed by local companies in international waters, can be completed.

For passengers, some of whom had spent tens of thousands of dollars and awaited the cruise for years, it was a crushing and unanticipated blow. For those in the industry in Australia and New Zealand, though, the incidents were all too foreseeable, even if the cause of a spate of them occurring in such a short time frame remained mysterious.

“A lot of people are going to look at it at face value and say the cruise ships were negligent,” said Ashley Coutts, a marine invasion biologist and the chief scientist at the company Biofouling Solutions, based in Tasmania, the Australian island state. “But there’s a lot more to it,” he said.

Few countries take as many biosecurity precautions as New Zealand, which goes to great lengths to protect its natural ecosystems. Passengers who arrive by air, for example, are met at the airport by a phalanx of signs that urge them to dispense with any meat or vegetable products or face the consequences. Even a single undeclared apple, tucked into hand luggage and forgotten about, may carry an instant fine of 400 New Zealand dollars, or about \$250. (A recent bill [introduced in the country’s parliament](#) seeks to increase that fine almost threefold.)

New Zealanders largely support these efforts. Before the arrival of humans around 750 years ago, the archipelago had developed a unique ecosystem that soon proved vulnerable to the effects of over-hunting and the introduction of non-native species like rats and weasels. Today, certain birds native to New Zealand can be found only on sanctuary islands, far from the threat of introduced pests. Others are long extinct. Strict regulations protect what is left.

But fighting off invasions at sea has required a different tack.

Marine organisms — including mussels, oysters, algae, crabs and starfish, among a wider maritime cast — might hitch a ride either in the ballast water of ships, which helps the vessel’s stability, or by clinging to their exteriors, where they are known as biofoul. A global agreement, set by the regulatory authority known as the International Maritime Organization, dictates how ships handle organisms found in ballast water. But no such agreement exists for biofoul, allowing countries to set their own policy.

New Zealand’s standards, introduced in 2018, were the first of their kind in the world and are the most stringent. They stipulate that vessels must have a “clean hull,” with at most a coating of slime, stray gooseneck barnacles and a smattering of other organisms on their exterior. Once an initial clean is completed, usually in South East Asia, and the accompanying paperwork has been filed, the ship has 30 days to make its way to New Zealand.

Troubles arise if the authorities in New Zealand later conclude that the ship has not been sufficiently scoured, or if more biofoul accumulates on the ship as it wends its way to the country.

“It’s not something where, just because you clean it off, it suddenly stops. Marine growth continues to grow, especially at this time of the year. In warmer waters, things grow very quickly,” said Dr. Coutts, the marine biologist. “The poor cruise ship industry is really struggling — they’re doing everything they can.” Insufficient information about in-water cleaning policies and a lack of suitable equipment in the region further complicated compliance, Dr. Coutts added.

In a statement, Paul Hallett, a spokesman for Biosecurity New Zealand, said that the government agency had seen improved management of vessel hulls since the requirements were introduced.

“Ships have just started operating again post-pandemic and it would be too early to say whether there is an increase or a decrease,” he said, adding that occasional issues with cruise ships and biofoul occurred before the pandemic.

Between January 2020 and September 2022, 6 percent of international vessels entering New Zealand were asked to address biofouling issues, Mr. Hallett said.

For the passengers of the Viking Orion, watching a dive team at work cleaning the ship’s hull was a particular highlight, especially after days spent sitting at sea, and with the Australian mainland in sight. “It was the best entertainment of the cruise, at that point,” said Christine Goff, a passenger from Denver, Colo, in a phone interview.

Over eight days, passengers aboard the Viking Orion were haunted by the ghosts of the trip they had been promised. Scheduled lectures, which went on as planned, delivered tantalizing introductions to the destinations they might never go to. Screens around the ship showed weather forecasts for the cities they would not visit. (The forecasts could not be taken down, ship officials said, because they were controlled by technicians in California who were on vacation.)

Cracks began to show. Passengers noticed fewer crew members, and were told that some had been waylaid by the coronavirus. At breakfast, passengers said that oatmeal had become watered down, and eggs and fresh fruit vanished from the buffet. Rumors abounded that the ship had run out of rum, whiskey and vodka, panicking those who did not want beer, wine or any other substitutes.

“It seems crazy to complain about it, because you could get steak and shrimp whatever you wanted,” said Ms. Goff. “But it was obvious that they were starting to be cautious.”

Ms. Goff and her husband resolved to make the most of their time on the ship, spending quality time together that, at home, might be eaten up by work and other commitments. “We’d have dinner, sit by the pool, go to the entertainment show in the evening,” she said. “We came home well-rested — there wasn’t much to do but rest.”

But not every passenger was able to weather the delay so gracefully.

One woman, who had hoped to spend the long-planned trip seeing the animals of Australia and New Zealand as a last hurrah with her aging father, was constantly teetering on the precipice of tears. Another passenger, Ms. Goff recalled, publicly declined the offer of a compensatory voucher for a future cruise, saying that he had chosen to take the trip after being diagnosed with terminal cancer, and that he did not expect to live long enough to take any other cruises.

“If it was true, it was heartbreaking,” Ms. Goff said.

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| | <p>Different cruise companies have taken varying approaches toward compensating passengers waylaid by biofouling incidents. Regent has promised passengers a refund, said Mr. Hadlock, whereas Viking offered only a single-use cruise voucher, equivalent to the money paid for the ticket, that expires after one year.</p> <p>In a statement after the voyage, a spokesman for Viking said that “a limited amount of standard marine growth” had now been successfully cleaned off the ship. Those who had missed ports had been provided with a voucher valued at 100 percent of what passengers had paid to Viking, which could be used for “any future voyage,” he said. Passengers who had attempted to seek cash refunds said they had been unsuccessful.</p> <p>A spokeswoman for Regent acknowledged in a statement the “inconvenience, frustration, and disappointment” the disruption had caused passengers.</p> <p>In situations like these, where ports are missed because of bad weather, mechanical difficulties or emergencies like a person falling overboard, passengers have very little legal recourse. “You have to look at the cruise ticket to determine what rights any passenger has,” said Jim Walker, a Miami-based lawyer who specializes in cruise ships. “And there aren’t any. It only really contains limitations and exclusions that benefit the cruise lines.”</p> <p>For passengers who had traveled thousands of miles and saved for the trip of a lifetime, those vouchers are a difficult reminder of what might have been. Others have been left with a bitter taste in their mouths, and with questions to which they have found few answers.</p> <p>Mr. Hadlock, who had been aboard the Explorer, phrased it plainly. “Passengers would still like to know how this happened,” he said. “How was a major cruise line caught so off-guard by regulations?”</p> |
| | Return to Top |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 TSA: WA record for firearms in airports |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-breaks-record-for-number-of-firearms-found-by-tsa-in-airports-guns-spokane-seattle-tri-cities-dallas-nashville-phoenix# |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE, Wash. — The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) discovered 164 firearms in travelers’ carry-on luggage across Washington airports in 2022, with a majority found at Sea-Tac International Airport security checkpoints.</p> <p>Sea-Tac International Airport is the busiest airport in Washington, having screened 17.2 million passengers and crew, according to TSA. Last year, Sea-Tac discovered 113 firearms, while Spokane International Airport found 34, and Tri-Cities Airport discovered 11, which is a record number for each of the three airports.</p> <p>According to statistics from the TSA, travelers flying out of Sea-Tac brought firearms in their carry-on luggage at a rate of 6.56 per travelers screened, which falls below the national average. That figure roughly equates to a weapon discovered for every 152,453 travelers screened.</p> <p>“These statistics should serve as a reminder to every gun owner that they need to be aware of the contents of their carry-on bag before coming to the security checkpoint,” said TSA Federal Security Director for Washington Gregory Hawko. “Fortunately, we have a dedicated corps of TSA officers who remain vigilant while carrying out their security screening responsibilities.”</p> <p>In 2021, Washington airports discovered slightly fewer firearms, finding 145. Ninety-nine of those were found at Sea-Tac, 33 were found at Spokane International, and 10 were found at Tri-Cities Airport.</p> <p>The five U.S. airports with the most TSA firearm discoveries are the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport: 448 firearms found 2. Dallas Fort Worth International Airport: 385 found 3. George Bush Intercontinental Airport (Houston): 298 found |

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|-------------------------------|---|
| | 4. Nashville International Airport: 213 found 5. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport: 196 found |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/20 Clallam Co. SO turns to crowdfunding help |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/clallam-county-identify-jane-doe-elwha-river/281-740d7f51-2f32-435f-967e-86a34995689d |
| GIST | <p>PORT ANGELES, Wash. — The Clallam County Sheriff's Office is asking the public for donations to pay for a DNA analysis of a foot still in a shoe that washed ashore near the mouth of the Elwha River in Port Angeles in 2021.</p> <p>In 2022, the Clallam County Sheriff's Office partnered with Othram to determine if advanced forensic DNA testing could help establish an identity for the woman or possibly a close relative.</p> <p>Othram is a private, forensic genealogy company that specializes in testing trace amounts, degraded or contaminated DNA evidence. A DNASolves crowdfund has been created to cover the cost of the testing and casework. DNASolves works exclusively with law enforcement to facilitate fundraising for Othram's services.</p> <p>Investigators determined the shoe's label was a woman's size 8 New Balance brand shoe. Due to the limited recovery of the woman's remains, investigators have been unable to make a definitive determination about the woman's age, ethnicity or height.</p> <p>This discovery was one of over 20 shoes with feet in them that have washed up on shorelines surrounding the Salish Sea in the last decade.</p> <p>So, why does it occur?</p> <p>University of Washington Professor of Oceanography Dr. Parker MacCready says the phenomenon occurs due to three main factors: how bodies decompose in these waters, the buoyancy of the shoes and wind patterns in the region.</p> <p>Salish Sea waters are very cold, the temperature usually does not exceed 55 degrees. According to MacCready, the cool water helps preserve what is left of the bodies that is not eaten by marine life.</p> <p>That's where the shoes come in. Most modern sneakers contain a lot of foam, which is hard for scavengers to eat, so they often stay in tact, along with feet that are inside them. They are also very buoyant and frequently float to the surface.</p> <p>So, how do they end up on the shore? It primarily has to do with the wind.</p> <p>"Anything that's floating and that protrudes a little bit above the surface of the water, whether it's, you know, a piece of trash or a foot in a sneaker or a dead bird, or something like that, they are pushed around by the wind," MacCready said.</p> <p>The wind speed is very fast compared to the speed of the water. So, the wind will push an object through the water faster than the current can move it.</p> <p>This region also sits within the Roaring Forties, or areas of the world between 40 and 50 degrees longitude, which brings westerly winds.</p> <p>"We tend to have more onshore winds here," MacCready said. "And that would be a great way to persistently get more floating debris on our beaches."</p> |

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| | <p>The wind speed and pattern are why Washington and Canada see this phenomenon more frequently than other populated areas along the coast, like San Francisco.</p> <p>Locations along our longitude, like New York City, will see the same wind pattern, but will blow offshore, taking debris with it.</p> <p>Most of these deaths are from boating accidents, people slipping off rocks or suicides. Without identification or more of the body, the Clallam County Sheriff's Office does not know the cause of death for this Jane Doe.</p> <p>Anyone with information that could aid in this investigation is encouraged to contact the Clallam County Sheriff's Office by calling the tip line at 360-417-2540 and referencing agency case 2021-00023819.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/23 Mass shootings: 33 in 3 weeks |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/23/politics/mass-shootings-in-2023-what-matters/index.html |
| GIST | <p>At least 10 people are dead and another 10 injured after a mass shooting in Monterey Park, California, Saturday night, that happened as the city's large Asian American community was celebrating Lunar New Year weekend.</p> <p>A lot remains unknown, but the scenes of agony and horror are increasingly all too familiar in America. In fact, Saturday's mass shooting joins a staggering *32* others from just the first three weeks of 2023, per the Gun Violence Archive.</p> <p>Communities from Goshen, California, to Baltimore, Maryland, are reeling while others brace for the possibility of such violence in their own backyards.</p> <p>"A time of a cultural celebration ... and yet another community has been torn apart by senseless gun violence," Vice President Kamala Harris told a crowd in Tallahassee, Florida, on Sunday. "All of us in this room and in our country understand this violence must stop."</p> <p>But how that happens with a divided Congress, vastly different policy prescriptions, and a deeply entrenched gun culture remains to be seen.</p> <p>The sobering data It's bad however you look at it.</p> <p>Firearm injuries are now the leading cause of death among people younger than 24 in the United States, according to a study published in the December 2022 edition of Pediatrics, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.</p> <p>From 2015 through 2020, there were at least 2,070 unintentional shootings by children under 18 in the US, according to a report from Everytown. Those shootings resulted in 765 deaths and 1,366 injuries.</p> <p>An unequal burden. A study published late last year in JAMA Network Open analyzed firearm deaths over the past three decades – a total of more than 1 million lives lost since 1990.</p> <p>The researchers found that firearm mortality rates increased for most demographic groups in recent years – especially during the Covid-19 pandemic – but vast disparities persisted. The homicide rate among young Black men – 142 homicide deaths for every 100,000 Black men ages 20 to 24 – was nearly 10 times higher than the overall firearm death rate in the US in 2021.</p> |

Americans are armed like few others. There are about 393 million privately owned firearms in the US, according to an estimate by the [Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey](#). That's 120 guns for every 100 Americans.

While the exact number of civilian-owned firearms is difficult to calculate due to a variety of factors – including unregistered weapons, the illegal trade and global conflict – no other nation has more civilian guns than people.

About 45% of US adults say they live in a household with a gun, according to an October 2022 [Gallup survey](#).

How should we define ‘mass shooting’?

The Gun Violence Archive, like CNN, defines a mass shooting as one in which at least four people are shot, excluding the shooter.

But what defines a mass shooting depends on whom you ask.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, for example, has cited [2012 legislation](#) defining a “mass killing” as “three or more killings in a single incident.”

Mass Shooting Tracker, a crowd-sourced data base, defines mass shooting as “a single outburst of violence in which four or more people are shot.”

Everytown For Gun Safety defines a mass shooting as any incident in which four or more people are shot and killed, excluding the shooter.

The lack of a firm definition doesn't help in addressing the problem. And the squishiness opens up room to interpret the data differently. The conservative Daily Caller, for example, has [cited](#) a definition of “public mass shootings” included in a 2013 Congressional Research Service report that is so narrow it only identified 78 of them between 1983 and 2012.

A 2019 research paper published in [Injury Epidemiology](#) put a spotlight on this issue: “Gun Violence Archive recorded the most mass shooting incidents at 346 incidents in 2017, while Mother Jones only recorded 11 cases.”

The authors' conclusion? “Establishing a definition for ‘mass shooting’ will improve the quality of analyses being completed. This could lead to an improvement in not only public awareness and understanding of mass shooting facts, but also arguments to policymakers for legislation that could alleviate the burden that mass shootings place on society.”

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/23 Motive sought for Calif. mass shooting |
|----------|---|
| SOURCE | https://www.cbsnews.com/news/monterey-park-mass-shooting-california-motive-lunar-new-year-celebrations/ |
| GIST | <p><i>Monterey Park, Calif.</i> — Authorities searched for a motive for the gunman who killed 10 people at a Los Angeles-area ballroom dance club during Lunar New Year celebrations, slayings that sent a wave of fear through Asian American communities in the region and cast a shadow over festivities nationwide.</p> <p>Authorities said the suspect was found dead Sunday of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in a van in which he fled after people thwarted his attempt at a second shooting Saturday night.</p> <p>The massacre was the nation's fifth mass killing this month. It was also the deadliest attack since May 24, when 21 people were killed in an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.</p> <p>Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna identified the man as 72-year-old Huu Can Tran and said no other suspects were at large. Luna said Tran's motive remained unclear.</p> |

The attack also wounded 10 people, seven of whom were still hospitalized.

None of the victims had been officially identified as of Sunday night.

Speaking at a Sunday evening news conference, the sheriff said he didn't have the exact ages of the people killed but that all appeared to be over 50.

The suspect was carrying what Luna described as a semi-automatic pistol with an extended magazine, and a second handgun was discovered in the van where Tran died.

Monterey Park Police Chief Scott Wiese said Sunday evening that within three minutes of receiving the call, officers arrived at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park. There, they found carnage inside and people trying to flee through all the doors.

"When they came into the parking lot it, (it) was chaos," Wiese said.

About 20 to 30 minutes after the first attack, the gunman entered the Lai Lai Ballroom in the nearby city of Alhambra. But people wrested the weapon away from him and witnesses said he fled in a white van, according to Luna.

"He walked in there with a firearm and some individuals wrestled the firearm away from him, and that individual took off," Luna said earlier Sunday.

The van was found in the city of Torrance, another community that's home to many Asian Americans, about 22 miles from the second location.

Luna said earlier Sunday that law enforcement was dealing with a "barricaded suspect situation" in Torrance. Officers pulled over a white van at 10:20 a.m. local time Sunday, Luna said. The van then pulled into a shopping center parking lot and police heard a single gunshot from inside the vehicle, according to Luna. Officers wearing tactical gear and armor, approached the van at 12:52 p.m. and found the suspect dead.

The dramatic scene involving the van was captured by news helicopters, with multiple armored vehicles positioned in front of, to the side of and behind the van, with officers in fatigues and body armor at the rear of one of the police vehicles. After surrounding the vehicle for hours, law enforcement officials swarmed and entered it. A person's body appeared to be slumped over the wheel and was later removed. Members of a SWAT team looked through the van's contents before walking away.

Monterey Park is a city of about 60,000 people on the eastern edge of Los Angeles and is composed mostly of Asian immigrants from China or first-generation Asian Americans. The shooting happened in the heart of its downtown, where red lanterns decorated the streets for the Lunar New Year festivities. A police car was parked near a large banner that proclaimed "Happy Year of the Rabbit!"

The celebration in Monterey Park is one of California's largest. Two days of festivities, which have been attended by as many as 100,000 people in past years, were planned. But officials canceled Sunday's events following the shooting.

Tony Lai, 35, of Monterey Park was stunned when he came out for his early morning walk to learn that the noises he heard in the night were gunshots.

"I thought maybe it was fireworks. I thought maybe it had something to do with Lunar New Year," he said. "And we don't even get a lot of fireworks here. It's weird to see this. It's really safe here. We're right in the middle of the city, but it's really safe."

The massacre sent shock waves through Asian American communities around the nation, prompting police from San Francisco to New York to step up patrols at Lunar New Year celebrations in their own cities.

Asian American advocacy groups said it was another blow after years of high-profile anti-Asian violence around the country. "Regardless of what the intent was, the impact on our community has been really profound," said Connie Chung Joe, CEO of the nonprofit Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California.

Federal agents from the FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were on the scene assisting local police, and White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said President Biden had been updated on the shooting.

"Jill and I are thinking of those killed and injured in last night's deadly mass shooting in Monterey Par," Mr. Biden said in a statement Sunday night. "While there is still much we don't know about the motive in this senseless attack, we do know that many families are grieving tonight, or praying that their loved one will recover from their wounds."

Mr. Biden ordered flags to be flown at half-staff until sunset on Thursday.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said on Instagram that he visited Monterey Park Sunday.

"The strength of this community is incredible. No other country in the world is terrorized by this constant stream of gun violence. We need real gun reform at a national level," Newsom said.

According to CNN, Tran's ex-wife said she met Tran about 20 years ago at the Star Ballroom and that "while Tran was never violent to her ... he could be quick to anger." CNN also reported that "a second long-time acquaintance of Tran's also remembered him as a frequent presence at the dance studio."

Witnesses have identified one of those killed in as the owner of the Star Dance Studio, CBS Los Angeles reports.

The witnesses aid Ming Wei Ma was killed in a final act of selflessness.

"According to (an online) chat, he was the first to rush the shooter," said Eric Chen, a friend of Ming. "He was just caring, and other first, people first kind of person. ... "(It is) heartbreaking and it's unthinkable that it would happen."

Local resident Wong Wei told the Los Angeles Times his friend had been at the dance studio, and she had been in the bathroom when the shooting erupted. When she emerged from the bathroom, she saw a gunman and three bodies — two women and one person who he said was the boss of the studio.

The friend then fled to his home at around 11 p.m., Wei said, adding that his friends told him that the shooter appeared to fire indiscriminately with a long gun. "They don't know why, so they run," he told the newspaper.

Luna said Sunday afternoon that a victim center had been set up and urged anyone to go who suspected a family member had been at the dance hall.

A GoFundMe account has been set up for "the many individuals who are now suffering from this senseless violence."

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Seattle low dead body storage; fentanyl OD |
| SOURCE | https://mynorthwest.com/3788318/rantz-seattle-running-out-of-dead-body-storage-due-to-fentanyl-ods/ |
| GIST | Seattle's fentanyl overdose crisis is so bad that the King County Medical Examiner is running low on storage for dead bodies. The stunning admission was made by Seattle-King County Public Health Director Dr. Faisal Khan during a recent Board of Health meeting. |

“The Medical Examiner’s Office is now struggling with the issue of storing bodies because the fentanyl-related death toll continues to climb. Obviously, they have finite space in the coolers they use and that space is now being exceeded on a regular basis,” Dr. Khan admitted.

King County has already experienced over one fatal fentanyl overdose death a day for the month of January, with 31 deaths as of Jan. 22, 2023. Last year, the county recorded 1,019 fatal overdoses, with fentanyl responsible for the majority of deaths at 686. It’s the highest number of overdose deaths the county has ever [recorded](#).

Running low on storage space for dead addicts

Drug overdoses are straining the Medical Examiner’s resources, forcing the county to adapt to the rise in deaths. Not only are these deaths on top of every other death handled by the county, but the area’s population has also been growing.

“We have options for temporary morgue surge capacity when our census count gets high, including storing decedents on autopsy gurneys and partnerships with funeral homes. We’re exploring longer-term options for adding more capacity,” a Public Health spokesperson tells the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.

The drug crisis has worsened considerably since Washington Democrats decriminalized drugs after the state supreme court deemed the state’s felony possession law unconstitutional. Democrats had the option of changing one word in the law — adding “knowingly” to the possession law — but they opted to make it a misdemeanor, which is not charged. Effectively, Democrats legalized drugs over Republican objections.

The crisis will worsen in 2023

Democrats show no interest in fixing their mess. Rather than focusing on re-criminalizing drugs, they’re pushing bills to expand the availability of fentanyl testing strips. Obviously, that won’t make a dent in the fatal overdoses. But Democrats refuse to condemn drug use, claiming any judgment would stigmatize addicts and prevent them from seeking treatment. Under the current permissive drug strategy, addicts aren’t seeking treatment and homelessness is rising.

“The biggest driver of these fatal overdoses involves fentanyl in white powder and in fake pills, which are flooding the streets,” Dr. Khan noted.

Where are the drugs coming from? Our open southern border and chaotic point of entries with Mexico. President Joe Biden maintains an open-border policy, with Democrats doing nothing to tighten security. China is sending ingredients to produce fentanyl to Mexico, where drug cartels manufacture and distribute the deadly drug on our streets.

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Brazil riot: crimes against democracy? |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/brazilian-riot-investigators-probe-possible-crimes-against-democracy-11674411600?mod=hp_lead_pos10 |
| GIST | <p>BRASÍLIA—It was supposed to have been a peaceful day, though police expected demonstrations on the vast, grassy Esplanade where Brazil’s three branches of power are located.</p> <p>Adilson Paz said goodbye to his two teenage boys and headed to work as chief of the legislative police at the modernist lower house of Congress. He said he thought he would be home by dark that Sunday, Jan. 8.</p> <p>Instead, protesters opposed to the new leftist government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had by midday congregated by the tens of thousands. At 2:45 p.m., they knocked back the metal barriers some 200 yards from Congress. Hundreds then busted through glass doors and onto the granite floors leading to the chambers where lawmakers, out on recess, normally convened, Mr. Paz said.</p> |

A fire extinguisher was discharged on sculptor Alfredo Ceschiatti's bronze statue. Protesters unfurled emergency water hoses and flooded the green carpeting. They overturned chairs. A soccer ball signed by Brazilian striker Neymar was stolen, police said, as well as a golden shell Qatar gave Brazil.

And they battled with Mr. Paz's officers.

"On the front line, they were wearing masks, to protect themselves from the gas," Mr. Paz said last week, speaking of tear gas and pepper spray, as he gave a tour of the building. "Lots of people in camouflage clothes, with sticks, with stones. They were ready for battle."

A broad-ranging investigation into the invasion of Congress, the presidential palace and the Supreme Court that day has resulted in more than 1,800 people being arrested and prompted investigators to open probes against former high-ranking government officials, the federal police and prosecutors say.

The most prominent target is the right-wing former president, Jair Bolsonaro, who prosecutors say incited the violence by not conceding his election loss to Mr. da Silva in the Oct. 30 presidential elections and asserting for months before the vote that it could be stolen, without offering evidence.

But while some government officials say the riot was part of plan to unseat Mr. da Silva, using Bolsonaro supporters as front-line troopers, it isn't yet clear to investigators what were its political objectives, if any.

"This is an investigation of extraordinary dimensions," Carlos Frederico Santos, the high-ranking federal prosecutor leading the investigation into the Jan. 8 attacks, said in an interview. "There are several pieces of evidence to be investigated, and we still have more than a thousand people in jail."

A team of prosecutors is trying to determine who financed the operation, who incited the rioters and who executed the attacks, officials involved with the investigation say. While the investigation is centered on the events of Jan. 8, investigators say, they are also probing protesters and their supporters who for weeks had camped in front of army bases in cities nationwide to demand the army rise up to remove Mr. da Silva, a federal crime in Brazil.

So far, more than 40 people have been charged as of Thursday with crimes ranging from the violent abolishment of the democratic rule of law to criminal association to damaging public property, the chief prosecutor's office said.

While prosecutors say the objectives of those who led or who financed the invasion by busing in Bolsonaro supporters and paying for provisions isn't yet clear, those facing off against the protesters in the capital's Three Powers Square said that the violence had a certain level of precision.

Mr. Paz said men using ropes rappelled into the lower house across an iconic blue-and-white tiled wall.

"They said, 'We're coming into the hall. We're going to burn everything,'" recounted Mr. Paz, who is 46 years old and used his linebacker build to counter the rioters. "They said, 'Here we are all patriots, there are no leaders, we are going to invade...Leave while there's still time because if we go in, we'll break everything, we'll set everything on fire and you are going to die.'"

Mr. Paz called for reinforcements, with dozens arriving via underground tunnels to back the 30 officers under his command. Even so, it took three hours to push the invaders out.

Prosecutors and police say they are now working to file charges against the hundreds who were detained and freed, using DNA collected at the scene.

They are also studying posts rioters left on social media to tie suspects with specific crimes, from organizing the violence to the destruction in the buildings, such as the shattering of a 200-year-old clock belonging to King Dom João VI of Portugal. Law-enforcement authorities say digital platforms,

particularly messaging services Telegram and WhatsApp, played a central role in organizing the turmoil.

For weeks after Mr. da Silva's election victory, chat groups with 120 to 150 people each were used by Mr. Bolsonaro's supporters to rally at military bases to call for the army to unseat Mr. da Silva and to plan for the Jan. 8 protest in the capital, said Viktor Chagas, a researcher at Fluminense Federal University in Niterói, who has monitored about 120 of these groups.

Many were driven by misinformation and conspiracy theories, he said. "These kinds of environments really create an alternative reality," he said.

"This is not a grass-roots movement trying to spontaneously organize itself," Mr. Chagas added, echoing similar assessments by prosecutors and police.

A message in one group on the Telegram app called for Mr. Bolsonaro's supporters to "seize power, seize the nation, surround all the buildings" in the capital. "Our Brazilian people are going to save this nation," the message said, echoing assertions that Mr. da Silva would implant communism.

The encampments at the army bases, which began after the October election, drew people like Maria Esmeralda de Queiroz.

"We do not consider that man our president," the Brasília businesswoman said of Mr. da Silva earlier this month at the base in the capital. "I am sure the military will do something about this."

In a WhatsApp group, a user urged people to travel from the city of Blumenau to Brasília, saying that transportation by bus would be provided, along with free food.

And during the rioting in Brasília, many supporters of Mr. Bolsonaro celebrated as they posted videos of themselves on social media.

"We took Congress, we took Congress, freedom, freedom," shouted one man, standing in front of Congress, dressed in Brazil's yellow and green national soccer jersey in a video posted on Instagram. In another video, as attackers targeted the Supreme Court, a man yelled, "This is ours, this is ours."

In an interview Wednesday with GloboNews Television, Mr. da Silva said the attacks on the capital "gave me the impression that this was the beginning of a coup d'état."

"Everyone who has been involved, who invaded, who caused damage in the palace, the Congress and the Supreme Court, has to be convicted," he added. "Otherwise, we can't guarantee the existence and the survival of democracy."

High-ranking police officials said that while the country's investigative entities say crimes against democracy took place, the officials haven't determined if a plan to unseat the government was in play.

"We will investigate crimes, and if at the end we understand all this has been carried out for a coup d'état...the conclusion of the investigations will tell," one of the officials said.

The official said an essential piece of evidence pointing to something larger was seized by police at the home of a former Bolsonaro administration justice minister, Anderson Torres, who was the head of security in the capital at the time of the rioting. It is an unsigned draft decree to suspend the results of the October elections, alleging potential abuse by the national election authority.

"That is a very, very important document that indicates that they were planning something," said the police official.

Mr. Torres said on Twitter that it is normal for justice ministers to receive varied proposals and suggestions and that the document was to have been discarded with others.

The former justice minister, who surrendered to authorities on Jan. 14 upon flying to Brazil from the U.S. after the Supreme Court issued an order for his arrest in relation to security lapses in the capital, couldn't be reached to elaborate, and his lawyers haven't commented. He issued a statement condemning the violence shortly after it took place and on Twitter said: "I am certain that the truth will prevail."

Mr. Bolsonaro didn't publicly call for violence on Jan. 8 and has condemned the riot. He had skipped the Jan. 1 inauguration of Mr. da Silva, a break with tradition and protocol, and flew to Orlando, Fla., where he remains.

A person close to Mr. Bolsonaro's inner circle said by phone from the U.S. that the former president's supporters weren't responsible—but that the violence was rather carried out by people from the left planted among peaceful pro-Bolsonaro demonstrators. He didn't provide evidence to back his assertion.

"They were pretending to be Bolsonaro supporters when they were not—it's a big lie," he said.

Some pro-Bolsonaro protesters, though, say they have given up. The government has closed the encampments outside army bases. And Brasília is now calm.

"I lost hope," said Gustavo Duarte, a pro-Bolsonaro supporter who had protested the da Silva victory. "I see now that the institutions are on the side of the new government."

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/23 Man wrestles gun from L.A. mass shooter |
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| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/23/us/monterey-park-hero.html |
| GIST | <p>SAN MARINO, Calif. — Saturday night was winding down at the Lai Lai Ballroom & Studio, with less than a half-hour to go until closing. There were three people left on the spacious dance floor.</p> <p>Brandon Tsay, the third-generation operator of the family-run dance hall in Alhambra, was in the office off the lobby, watching the ballroom, when he heard the front doors swing close and a strange clang that sounded like metallic objects hitting one another.</p> <p>He turned around to see a semiautomatic assault pistol pointed at him.</p> <p>"He was looking at me and looking around, not hiding that he was trying to do harm. His eyes were menacing," recalled Mr. Tsay, 26, at his family's San Marino home Sunday, less than 24 hours after he stared down a gunman who, unbeknown to him, had opened fire at another nearby ballroom, killing 10 people and injuring several others in one of California's worst mass shootings.</p> <p>About 20 minutes after that massacre, the shooter, who authorities identified as Huu Can Tran, 72, arrived at Lai Lai, just about two miles to the north, officials said.</p> <p>Mr. Tsay struggled with the gunman and eventually disarmed him, saving countless lives and averting another tragedy. It was an act that officials roundly praised as heroic. Mr. Tran was found dead Sunday afternoon of a self-inflicted gunshot in a van about 30 miles away, according to law enforcement officials.</p> <p>Mr. Tsay said the weapon the gunman was carrying signaled he intended to inflict maximum damage.</p> <p>"How it was built and customized, I knew it wasn't for robbing money," Mr. Tsay said of the weapon. "From his body language, his facial expression, his eyes, he was looking for people."</p> |

Sheriff Robert Luna of Los Angeles County said in a news briefing Sunday afternoon that “two community members” had disarmed the shooter at the Alhambra ballroom. “This could have been much worse,” he said.

But Mr. Tsay and his family, who reviewed the security camera footage from the lobby of the ballroom, said it was he alone who fought the gunman over control of the weapon and wrested it from him. The doors to the ballroom were closed and no one else was involved, they said.

“It was just my son. He could have died,” said his father, Tom Tsay, who said he was proud of his son for the bravery he showed. “He’s lucky, someone was watching over him.”

His older sister, Brenda, who currently runs the business, said the video showed a prolonged, fierce struggle between the two men all over the lobby.

“He kept coming at him, he really wanted the gun back,” she said of the gunman.

The younger Mr. Tsay, a computer coder who mans the ticket office a few days a week at the ballroom started by his grandparents, said it was around 10:35 p.m. Saturday that he turned to face the gunman, whom he didn’t recognize. He had never seen a real gun before, but could tell that it was a deadly weapon, he said.

“My heart sank, I knew I was going to die,” he said.

The next moment, he lunged and grabbed the weapon by its barrel and began wrestling with the gunman for control of it.

“That moment, it was primal instinct,” he said. “Something happened there. I don’t know what came over me.”

They fought over control of the gun for about a minute and a half, and it felt like they were similarly matched in strength, Mr. Tsay said. At one point, the gunman looked down at the weapon and took one hand off it, as if to manipulate the gun to begin shooting. Mr. Tsay said he seized the moment and pried the pistol away from the man.

He pointed the weapon back at him and yelled: “Go, get the hell out of here,” he recalled.

Mr. Tsay, who stayed up all night assisting police with their investigation, said he felt traumatized and hadn’t quite been able to process what he had been through. He particularly felt heartbroken for the community of Monterey Park and surrounding areas where his family and their ballroom had become established as a beloved haven over three decades, he said.

“Lai Lai,” a name his grandmother chose, means “come, come,” in Chinese, his sister said. The assailant, dressed in black, looked like he could easily be one of their regulars, he said.

“We have such a tight-knit community of dancers,” he said. “It feels so terrible something like this happened, to have one of our individuals try to harm others.”

[Return to Top](#)

| | |
|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Suspect in L.A. mass shooting killed self |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/22/us/shooting-monterey-park-california#shooting-monterey-park-california |
| GIST | LOS ANGELES — It was a party to celebrate the Lunar New Year, and dance students gathered at a beloved studio in the heart of Monterey Park, Calif., once marketed as a city of dreams for Chinese immigrants newly arrived in America. |

Attached to an Asian herbal store, the exterior of Star Ballroom Dance Studio was humble, its entrance off a parking lot marked by a small awning. Yet its expansive dance floor attracted marquee teachers and high-level performers from around the world. It was considered a refuge for its clientele, many of whom were older Chinese Americans who had found a comfortable space to twirl and socialize. Emanating from its doors late at night was music fit for the waltz, fox trot, tango and more.

But on Saturday night, sometime after 10 p.m., a gunman strode inside and shattered any feeling of sanctuary.

Five men and five women were fatally shot and 10 more were injured before the gunman, the police believe, left the scene and entered a second dance club in nearby Alhambra, where patrons were able to disarm him before he fled in what investigators described as a white cargo van.

The drama came to an end on Sunday afternoon, when after an hourslong manhunt, a SWAT team pinned that van in a parking lot in Torrance, some 30 miles from the scene of the shootings. Officers heard one shot as they approached the van, and discovered that the suspect had shot himself, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

The man, identified as Huu Can Tran, 72, was pronounced dead at the scene.

“I’m here to report that the suspect responsible for this tragedy is no longer a threat,” the sheriff said.

The attack was the deadliest mass shooting in the United States since [the massacre in Uvalde, Texas](#), last May, when 19 children and two teachers were killed, and the second major shooting in less than a week in California, after [gunmen killed a family of six in Tulare County](#) last Monday in what the police said was probably a gang-related slaying.

The killings on Sunday occurred on the eve of the Lunar New Year, a significant holiday for Asian Americans that had drawn thousands of people out to celebrate in Monterey Park earlier in the day, with plans to continue on Sunday. Neighbors would later be horrified to learn that what they thought had been the sound of celebratory fireworks was actually the explosion of gunfire.

Dozens of people were at the dance studio Saturday night, many of them facing a mirror as they performed a Chinese square dance, according to a student named Grace who was there, who said she had been dancing at the studio for about four years.

She said many people did not notice when the gunman first arrived. Then, a round of rapid-fire shots rang out. “No one dared to flee. We all got down to the ground, hiding wherever we could,” said Grace, who asked to be identified only by her English first name. She said the gunman appeared to run out of ammunition, left and then returned. “No one could get out,” she said.

People fled to the back, she said, trying to hide in the restrooms and in a room used for karaoke.

She said she heard at least 10 shots. “First time was five or six or seven in a row. And then he ran out of bullets and then he came back and kept shooting.” All told, the gunman was inside the studio for about five minutes, she said.

Jeff Liu, 62, had been standing near the entrance when the gunman entered, according to his daughter, Juno Blees. Mr. Liu was grazed by bullets on his shoulder and his back, she said.

Ms. Blees said her father told her the gunman had appeared to shoot indiscriminately at those inside, including a worker selling tickets at a booth.

Mr. Liu’s wife, Nancy, collapsed and, as of Sunday afternoon, the family did not know her location or condition, she said. “We called all of the hospitals, but we could not locate her.”

The Monterey Park police chief, Scott Wiese, said the officers who arrived at the ballroom less than three minutes after the first call were among the youngest on the city's force. The scene they encountered was "chaos," he said, with dead and injured people inside the building and witnesses running out of the doors.

"My young officers did their job, searched for a suspect and then came back and had to deal with the carnage that was inside," he said. "And it was extensive."

Officials learned that the suspect had gone next to the dance club in Alhambra, Sheriff Luna said, where he was disarmed by community members who he said should be considered heroes.

"I can tell you that the suspect walked in there probably with the intent to kill more people," he said.

After the alert for the white cargo van went out, tactical teams surrounded a vehicle matching that description in Torrance, the sheriff said. More than an hour of tense preparations ensued, during which tactical officers pinned in the van with armored vehicles, and eventually broke its windows and entered. Sheriff Luna said evidence found in the van linked the man inside, who had shot and killed himself, to both crime scenes.

A handgun was recovered from the van, Sheriff Luna said, adding that the weapon confiscated from the suspect in Alhambra, a magazine-fed semiautomatic assault pistol with an extended large-capacity magazine attached to it, was probably not legal in California.

Monterey Park, a city of about 60,000 residents, is more than 60 percent Asian American. Located about seven miles east of downtown Los Angeles, it is considered a mecca for Chinese immigrants, a place where they could find comfort in the food and language of their birth land while putting down American roots for their children. With more space than Los Angeles's Chinatown, it is a suburban enclave that a well-known developer once advertised as "the Chinese Beverly Hills," and it remains a destination in the San Gabriel Valley, a region known for its immigrant populations and Asian and Latin cuisine.

After a three-year hiatus during the pandemic, the city's two-day Lunar New Year celebration had been a much anticipated event. On Saturday afternoon, Garvey Avenue, a main thoroughfare, was a cheerful scene of vendors and carnival rides. But it would soon be closed off with police tape.

Representative Judy Chu, whose district includes Monterey Park and who served as its mayor three times, said the attack "tore a hole through all of our hearts." She had, she said, become a member of an unfortunate club: a civic leader with a mass shooting to respond to.

"It has been happening on a daily basis now, and we can barely keep count of these mass shootings," Ms. Chu said.

She said it was important to curtail the availability of weapons, "so that it is not so easy for someone to walk into an establishment and shoot people and ruin their lives," she said.

On Sunday, families of the victims and others who have long gathered at the dance studio were trying to make sense of what had happened.

Ms. Blees, whose father was injured and whose mother was missing, said her parents had emigrated from China to Monterey Park more than 20 years ago and rarely left each other's side. She said her father was resting at home, torn by the lack of news about his wife and the dear friends he had made over the years.

"My parents go there a lot. They love it. They know everyone there," she said. "It is terrible what happened."

Elizabeth Yang, who dances at the studio on Mondays, said that at 40 years old, she is typically the youngest in attendance. The students take their craft seriously, she said, with women arriving in long,

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| | <p>jewel-encrusted dresses. But they arrive to a welcoming environment, with refreshments and warm greetings, she said.</p> <p>“They are folks who are enjoying the rest of their lives and wanting to have something fun,” Ms. Yang said. “They were so friendly, they would put me in front of the class, so I can be closer to the instructor.”</p> <p>Heather Smith, a dance coach who trains competitors at Star Dance Ballroom, said she and the owner of the studio were at a ballroom competition and gala at a different location when the shooting occurred, but that the owner’s boyfriend had died in the shooting.</p> <p>“Our dance community is very close-knit,” Ms. Smith said. “We are all just in complete shock.”</p> <p>Ms. Smith said that the studio owner had been intent on reopening the dance studio during the pandemic “because she knows that dancing makes everyone happy.”</p> <p>Thomas Wong, a Monterey Park city councilman, who grew up in the city and whose council district includes the site of the shooting, said many of his acquaintances had taken lessons at the studio.</p> <p>“It’s a longtime business in the community, and a gathering place,” Mr. Wong said. “It’s shocking, especially this weekend, of all weekends,” he added. “We were welcoming everyone back for the first time since the pandemic. To start off the year like this is just tragic.”</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Shooting at Tacoma high school injures 2 |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/2-injured-following-tacoma-shooting-at-mt-tahoma-high-school-police-investigate# |
| GIST | <p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma Police Department is investigating a shooting after two people with gunshot wounds showed up at St. Clare Hospital in Lakewood.</p> <p>The injured persons told Lakewood police officers they were confronted by two people at Mt. Tahoma High School and then shot in the parking lot. Tacoma police officers found shell casings in the parking lot following preliminary investigations.</p> <p>The two victims are now in stable condition and are being transported to Madigan and Tacoma General.</p> <p>Lakewood Police Department handed the case to Tacoma Police Department since the shooting happened in the city of Tacoma.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Tacoma police: 3rd homicide in 10days |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/tacoma-third-homicide-2023/281-5ea48947-77df-4394-b775-ce6a8247821e |
| GIST | <p>TACOMA, Wash. — The Tacoma Police Department is investigating its third homicide of the year after a man was shot and killed early Sunday near the Temple Theater.</p> <p>Tacoma police officers were called to the 100 block of St. Helens Avenue at around 1:45 a.m. for a reported shooting.</p> <p>Arriving officers found a man in his 40s with a gunshot wound. The man was transported to the hospital where he died from his injuries, according to the Tacoma Police Department.</p> <p>The Tacoma Police Department said the shooting is being investigated as a homicide and that it is ongoing.</p> <p>No other information was released.</p> |

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| | <p>This marks Tacoma's third homicide of 2023. Two teens, 14 and 16, were shot and killed within the past 10 days.</p> <p>According to the city's website, Tacoma averages approximately 18 homicides per year. Tacoma police have investigated as many as 35 homicides in one year and as few as nine.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 Baton Rouge club shooting: 12 injured |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/12-shot-baton-rouge-nightclub-police/story?id=96597397 |
| GIST | <p>Police are investigating a shooting that injured 12 people at a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, nightclub.</p> <p>The shooting occurred just after 1:30 a.m. Sunday at 4619 Bennington Ave in Baton Rouge, according to the Baton Rouge Police Department.</p> <p>The gunshot victims were taken to local hospitals, either by personal vehicles or by emergency responders, police said. They are all currently listed in stable condition.</p> <p>The motive for the shooting is under investigation, police said.</p> <p>Investigators did not release any information on a possible suspect.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
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| HEADLINE | 01/22 Jan 6 riot charges: 3 active-duty USMC |
| SOURCE | https://www.tpr.org/military-veterans-issues/2023-01-22/three-active-duty-marines-are-charged-in-the-jan-6-riot |
| GIST | <p>A Marine who said he was waiting for "Civil war 2" and two other active-duty members of the military have been charged with participating in the riot at the U.S. Capitol, authorities said in newly filed court papers.</p> <p>Micah Coomer, Joshua Abate and Dodge Dale Hellonen were arrested this week on misdemeanor charges after their fellow Marines helped investigators identify them in footage among the pro-Trump mob on Jan. 6, 2021, according to court papers.</p> <p>Dozens of people charged in the riot have military backgrounds, but these three are among only a handful on active duty. A Marine Corps officer seen on camera scuffling with police and helping other members of the mob force their way into the Capitol was charged in 2021.</p> <p>No defense lawyers for the men were listed in the court docket, so it was not immediately clear whether they have attorneys to comment on their behalf.</p> <p>Their service records show they are all active-duty Marines. Maj. Kevin Stephensen, a spokesman for the Marine Corps, said it is aware of the allegations and "is fully cooperating with appropriate authorities in support of the investigation."</p> <p>Coomer, of Indiana, is stationed in Southern California's Camp Pendleton; Abate, of Virginia, is at Fort Meade in Maryland; and Hellonen, of Michigan, is stationed at North Carolina's Camp Lejeune, according to the Marines.</p> <p>The men spent about 52 minutes inside the Capitol, authorities say. At one point while in the rotunda, they put a red "Make American Great Again" hat on a statue to take pictures with it, according to court papers. Hellonen was carrying a "Don't Tread on Me" flag, authorities said.</p> |

Coomer posted photos on Instagram that appeared to be taken inside the Capitol with the caption "Glad to be apart of history," according to court documents. Days after the 2020 election, he and another person discussed over Instagram message how he believed the election was rigged.

And in late January 2021, he told another person in a message that "everything in this country is corrupt."

"We honestly need a fresh restart. I'm waiting for the boogaloo," Coomer wrote in a message detailed in court documents. When asked by the person what's "a boogaloo," Coomer responded "Civil war 2," authorities said.

The boogaloo is an anti-government, pro-gun extremist movement. Its name is a reference to a slang term for a sequel — in this case, a second U.S. civil war. The movement is named after "Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo," a 1984 sequel to a movie about breakdancing.

Supporters have shown up at protests over COVID-19 lockdown orders and protests over racial injustice, carrying rifles and wearing tactical gear over Hawaiian shirts. The shirts are a reference to "big luau," a riff on the term "boogaloo" sometimes favored by group members.

During an interview related to his security clearance in June, Abate acknowledged walking through the Capitol with two "buddies," investigators said. Abate said they "walked around and tried not to get hit with tear gas."

The Pentagon said Abate was assigned to the Marine Cryptologic Support Battalion, which supports the National Security Agency. One of the largest U.S. intelligence agencies, the NSA spies on electronic communications around the world and has a critical role in deterring cyberattacks and foreign influence operations.

A spokesperson for the NSA declined to answer questions about when the agency learned of Abate's statement that he had entered the Capitol or if it took action prior to his arrest to restrict his access to classified information.

The trio face charges including illegal entry and disorderly conduct.

Among Jan. 6 defendants with military backgrounds are members of the far-right extremist group the Oath Keepers, accused of plotting to violently keep President Donald Trump in power. The group's leader, Stewart Rhodes, a former Army paratrooper, was convicted of seditious conspiracy in November.

A Navy reservist from Virginia accused of storming the Capitol was convicted this week on charges that he illegally possessed silencers disguised to look like innocuous cleaning supplies. Hatchet Speed is scheduled to go on trial in his Jan. 6 case later this year.

And a former U.S. Army reservist described by prosecutors as a Nazi sympathizer was convicted of storming the Capitol to obstruct Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory. Timothy Hale-Cusanelli, who was employed as a security contractor at a Navy base, was sentenced to four years in prison in September.

Nearly 1,000 people have been charged so far in the riot and the tally increases by the week. Almost 500 people have pleaded guilty to riot-related charges and more than three dozen have been convicted at trial.

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Haiti gangs expand control |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/haitian-gangs-expand-control-cops-family-left-shaken-96590983 |

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Every day when Marie Carmel Daniel's husband put on his flak vest and walked out the door for another day of fighting Haiti's gangs, she wondered if he would come home that night.

Friday was the day her smiling spouse of 18 years, Ricken Staniclasse, didn't.

One of the country's nearly 200 gangs ambushed his police unit that morning, sending gunfire echoing through the streets in an unexpected area — a mansion-lined stretch of the country's capital, Port-au-Prince.

A gang led by Lionel Lazarre battled the police patrol under the sweltering Caribbean heat as officers desperately called for backup. But help never came, the country's police union said.

The fighting killed three officers, hospitalized a fourth with bullet wounds and left the 44-year-old Staniclasse missing.

Daniel, meanwhile, was terrified for herself and their three children.

"My husband was fighting a lot with the gangs, and we don't know what could happen to us," Daniel, 43, said while curled up on her red couch surrounded by neighbors. "I can't sleep at the house anymore because I don't know what could happen to us."

The firefight was just the latest example of how Haitian gangs have grown in power and expanded in reach, leaving much of the population terrorized.

While the United Nations estimates that 60% of Port-Au-Prince is controlled by the gangs, nowadays most Haitians on the street reckon that number is closer to 100%.

Haiti has struggled with endemic gang violence for years, but the country spiraled into lawlessness after the 2021 killing of former President Jovenel Moïse.

Powerful gangs have taken advantage of the political chaos and discontent with the current government led by Prime Minister Ariel Henry to further consolidate their control.

The government has failed to ease the violence, forcing many to flee their homes. News of rapes, kidnappings and ambushes on police have become the new norm.

Jolicoeur Allande Serge, director of the police unit that was attacked, said the Friday blitz in the Pétion-Ville neighborhood was a sign of that. He noted that moving into upper class areas "benefits (the gangs') economic interests."

Kidnappings and ransoms as high as \$1 million have been a key part of the financing for such armed groups.

Meanwhile, police units struggle to keep up.

While Canada and the United States have sent armored vehicles and other supplies to Haiti, law enforcement officials say it is just a fraction of what they really need.

Tensions remained high Saturday, and in the afternoon Serge stood among a pack of armored trucks dented with bullet strikes. Officers holding automatic weapons, their faces covered by black masks, bustled about.

A group of 50 officers was returning to the area where they fought Friday night to try to break a gang blockade and search for the missing officer, Staniclasse.

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| | <p>“I lost three men ... We’re not scared. We’re frustrated because we don’t have enough equipment to fight,” Serge said as he watched a convoy of police trucks roll out from the station. “We need ammo, helmets, armored vehicles.”</p> <p>Analysts expect the bloodshed to get worse, especially after Haiti’s final 10 elected officers ended their Senate terms in early January, leaving the parliament and presidency unfilled because the government has failed to hold elections.</p> <p>Critics say that has turned Haiti into a “de-facto dictatorship.”</p> <p>Meanwhile, people like Marie Carmel Daniel feel hope drain for their country. Daniel said her husband always hoped he could help clean up his city. Together, they built a home and a life together. Their 11-year-old son dreamed of following in his father’s footsteps.</p> <p>“He loved people, he loved to help people,” she said of her husband.</p> <p>But two years ago, violence began to get so bad in their neighborhood that they applied for a visa to migrate to the United States, hoping to join an exodus of people leaving Haiti. They never got a reply.</p> <p>“I don't know if he's alive or dead, but I'm worried," she said. “If we were able to leave the country, my husband would be alive.”</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 Atlanta police arrest violent protesters |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/6-arrested-atlanta-protests-proposed-police-training-facility/story?id=96588474 |
| GIST | <p>Six people were arrested after a peaceful protest over a proposed police training ground turned violent in Atlanta, Georgia, Saturday night, police said.</p> <p>According to Atlanta Police Chief Darin Schierbaum, people protesting a new police training ground gathered around 5 p.m. and marched peacefully until, once downtown, several of the protestors "started committing illegal acts, which included the breaking of windows and also attacking police cruisers that were in the area."</p> <p>Police suppressed the violence quickly and no law enforcement officers or citizens were injured, Schierbaum said.</p> <p>Three businesses, however, sustained damages, he said.</p> <p>Mayor Andre Dickens said that some of tonight's protestors traveled in from elsewhere.</p> <p>"Many of them don't even live in Atlanta or in the state of Georgia, and they don't represent the voices of Atlanta," he said, adding that some of the protestors were armed with explosives.</p> <p>Dickens confirmed that a police car was lit on fire.</p> <p>Gov. Brian Kemp condemned the acts of violence on Twitter.</p> <p>"Violence and unlawful destruction of property are not acts of protest. They are crimes that will not be tolerated in Georgia and will be prosecuted fully," he tweeted.</p> <p>Saturday's protests appear to be the latest development in the opposition to a new training center for the Atlanta Police Department, announced in October 2021 by former Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, which would be carved out of a wooded area in DeKalb County.</p> |

The Atlanta Police Foundation acknowledged in a FAQ from September that in 2017 the city council approved a plan that would have turned the 85 acres into "greenspace and part of a larger effort to create an environmentally renewed South River Forest Basin."

However, the Foundation claims that the plan "was not well-known" and noted that it was not binding, unlike the 2021 vote to approve the use of the land to build the training center.

The Foundation also addressed criticism from environmentalists and said elected officials were prioritizing the "needs of our citizens to reduce crime and improve the performance of our law enforcement agencies at an affordable cost using existing taxpayer assets."

Earlier this week, police raided the forest where protestors have camped out for months, shot and killed a protestor identified as Manuel Esteban Paez Teran and claimed Teran fired first. An officer was struck in the hip by a bullet and treated at a hospital, police said.

Seven people were also arrested and charged with domestic terrorism following the fatal shooting.

The proposed 85-acre and \$90 million construction project -- nicknamed "Cop City" -- has been with backlash by activists who have camped out on the construction site for months in order to stop development on the project.

In December, five people were arrested and charged with domestic terrorism and other charges following a joint operation at the planned construction site.

Authorities have stated that crimes have taken place at the protest site following the arrests last month.

"Some of the criminal activities include carjacking, various crimes against persons, destruction of property, arson, and attacks against public safety officials," the Georgia Bureau of Investigation said after the incident. "Law enforcement continues to address the criminal acts committed by the individuals that continue to occupy the area of the proposed training site."

Protesters have claimed the police training center will only serve to further militarize law enforcement and that the conflict between the protesters and authorities have been escalating in recent months.

"What is taking place is a classic example of tyrannical government overreach," activists said in a statement published by the Atlanta Community Press Collective. "The public has a right to defend its interests. We are advocates of a free and peaceful society built on cooperation and mutual understanding. The government is escalating this situation pointlessly."

[Return to Top](#)

| HEADLINE | 01/20 Dubai frees Europe 'super cartel' drug lords |
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| SOURCE | https://www.vice.com/en/article/4ax99n/infuriating-super-cartel-drug-lords-freed-after-just-2-months |
| GIST | <p>Two alleged drug lords said to be kingpins in a European "super cartel" have been released just two months after being arrested in Dubai.</p> <p>In late November Edin Gacanin, a Dutch-Bosnian national described by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as one of the top 50 drug traffickers in the world, and Zuhair Belkhair, a Dutch-Moroccan accused of trafficking huge amounts of cocaine through the port of Rotterdam, were among 49 suspects arrested in a massive, highly-publicised, international police operation.</p> <p>Police said the two men were one of six "high value targets" captured during a series of raids co-ordinated by the EU's law enforcement agency Europol, the DEA and multiple police forces across Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.</p> <p>But, in a development that will be intensely embarrassing for law enforcement, it has been revealed that authorities in Dubai have released Gacanin and Belkhair, leaving officials baffled.</p> |

Gacanin, 40, nicknamed “Tito”, was considered the most powerful member of the so-called “super cartel” composed of Irish, British, Italian, Bosnian, Dutch and Chilean traffickers, until his arrest during an operation police dubbed “Desert Light”.

Yet he was freed completely – neither on bail nor facing extradition – on the 29th of December amid claims in the Dutch media that the Netherlands failed to provide proper extradition paperwork within 40 days, despite Dutch prosecutors arguing the paperwork was properly submitted on time. Belkhair was granted bail around the same time, while he awaits the extradition process to the Netherlands, according to a statement from his lawyer, Guy Weski, to local media in the Netherlands.

The release of the two men, reported yesterday for the first time by Dutch media, has shocked and angered Dutch authorities who believed the significant US involvement in the case would force the UAE to deport both men.

“At the moment, the client has indeed been released after payment of a bail. He is awaiting extradition proceedings,” Weski [told](#) the newspaper *Het Parool*.

But the situation with Gacanin, whose Dutch attorney has so far refused comment, is far less clear, according to Dutch prosecutors and law enforcement sources, who told VICE World News it appeared the request for his extradition had been rejected out of hand, but were pressing the UAE for more details.

An international law enforcement official who agreed to speak without attribution confirmed Belkhair had been released on bail but said there has been “little clarity,” as to the “status or location,” of Gacanin.

“This is frustrating and infuriating for the Dutch and the Americans,” said the Belgian police official of the releases of the two men. “The involvement of the DEA in [the operation] was supposed to get the Emiratis onboard, they’d received assurances the UAE judiciary was taking this seriously.”

Gacanin, born in Bosnia but raised in the Netherlands, is alleged to be a high profile figure in the cocaine industry, according to multiple law enforcement sources in the European Union and Bosnia.

“The DEA thinks he’s a top 50 trafficker – we think he might be in the top five European traffickers,” a European police official who cannot be named for security reasons told VICE World News in an interview last year.

“Tito controls significant production capabilities in Peru,” said the cop. “At least five [cocaine] production labs are directly controlled by Tito and some local partners. Control of labs is incredibly rare for European traffickers, in fact I can’t think of another, and this allows him to source large quantities of cocaine at wholesale prices.”

His release infuriated Dutch officials, who denied that the request for extradition was late or lacked complete paperwork, despite multiple news organisations reporting that Dubai had refused the Dutch request to deport him to Holland.

The Dutch Public Prosecution Service (OM) emphatically denied any failure to properly request Gacanin in a statement to the Dutch media.

“We know the stories about the documents being submitted too late. That is not true. We are working to find out what exactly is the cause,” spokesman Wim de Bruin told *Het Parool*.

Although Belkhair remains indicted and awaiting his Dubai extradition process while on bail, Gacanin was released without apparent conditions.

In the past UAE and Dubai authorities have been quietly criticised by prosecutors in multiple countries for allowing a slew of major cocaine traffickers from Ireland, the UK, Morocco and the Netherlands to operate

openly with little fear of arrest. As a result, over the last year the UAE has begun [clamping down on mega-rich criminals](#) using Dubai as a bolt-hole and to launder money

Adding to the tension between the UAE and Netherlands, it seems, according to the Dutch prosecutors, that both men have disappeared and might have left Dubai for some unknown location. Belkhair theoretically cannot leave the UAE while the extradition process remains ongoing, while it appears that Gacanin no longer faces any legal issue in the UAE and could travel freely to another country.

“We don’t know where the two suspects are now. We have no information about their whereabouts and their possibilities to cross the border,” an OM spokesperson told the online news portal NU.nl.

The police official in Belgium, a country which has multiple arrest and extradition requests out for traffickers operating from Dubai and Antwerp, said the UAE generally only arrested drug suspects at the request of other countries after extreme political pressure and negotiations.

“Dubai keeps insisting that Belgium and Holland need to negotiate a proper treaty,” said the Belgian cop. “But they have moved incredibly slowly despite our requests, then use the excuse that there’s no official agreement or procedure. And so these cocaine bosses remain free.”

Gacanin and [Irish mob boss Daniel Kinahan](#), boxer Tyson Fury’s former promoter, are now the only major members of what the DEA once described as a “super-cartel” in a 2017 confidential report, to remain free.

The other members, Dutch trafficker Ridouan Taghi, Ricardo Riquelme Vega aka “Rico the Chilean, and Italian mafia boss Rafeal Imperiale, all spotted alongside Kinahan and Gacanin at the Irish man’s 2017 wedding in Dubai by a confidential informant, have since been jailed or are on trial.

Vega is serving 11 years in the Netherlands, Imperiale was arrested in 2021 in Dubai and extradited to Italy after a months long diplomatic fight that included multiple Italian officials flying the the UAE to negotiate in person.

“Getting these fuckers in Dubai to do anything [on cocaine traffickers] is like pulling out your own teeth,” one Italian law enforcement official told VICE World News. The official cannot be identified for diplomatic sensitivity reasons.

Taghi is on trial for six murders in a specially built high security courthouse nicknamed “Ze Bunker,” on the outskirts of Amsterdam and is suspected of ordering a slew of other killings including the 2021 murder of prominent Dutch journalist Peter de Vries in central Amsterdam. Dutch officials were only able to try Taghi after members of his family in Morocco accidentally murdered the son of a famous Moroccan judge in a case of mistaken identity.

“Taghi would probably be sitting in Dubai right now but he fucked up and killed the son of a [Moroccan] judge,” said the Italian law enforcement source. “That meant the king of Morocco got involved and sent his guys to Dubai. The UAE might ignore the Dutch but they aren’t going to deny another Arab king revenge. That’s how Taghi got sent to Holland.”

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 School downplayed warnings about 6yr-old |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/01/21/richneck-elementary-school-shooting-warnings-downplayed/ |
| GIST | The Virginia teacher who was shot by a 6-year-old student repeatedly asked administrators for help with the boy but officials downplayed educators’ warnings about his behavior, including dismissing his threat to light a teacher on fire and watch her die, according to messages from teachers obtained by The Washington Post. |

The previously unreported incidents raise fresh questions about how Richneck Elementary School in Newport News handled the troubled student before police say he [shot Abigail Zwerner](#) as she taught her first-grade class earlier this month. Authorities have called the shooting “intentional” but are still investigating the motive.

Many parents are already outraged over Richneck officials’ management of events before the shooting. Newport News Superintendent George Parker III has said school officials got a tip the boy had a gun that day and [searched his backpack, but that staffers never found the weapon](#) before authorities say the 6-year-old shot Zwerner. Newport News Police Chief Steve Drew said his department was [not contacted about the report that the boy had a weapon before the shooting](#).

Police and school officials have repeatedly declined to answer questions about the boy’s disciplinary issues or worrisome behaviors the 6-year-old may have exhibited and how school officials responded, citing the child’s age and the ongoing law enforcement investigation. The boy’s family said in a statement he has an “acute disability,” but James Ellenson, an attorney for the family, declined to comment on accounts of the boy’s behavior or how it was handled by the school.

School district spokeswoman Michelle Price said in a phone interview late Friday that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a federal law protecting students’ privacy, prohibits her from releasing information related to the 6-year-old.

“I cannot share any information in a child’s educational record,” she said. “A lot of what you’re asking is part of the child’s educational record, and it’s also a matter of an ongoing police investigation and an internal school investigation. Unfortunately, some of these details I’m not even privy to.”

Screenshots of a conversation held online between school employees and Parker shortly after the shooting show educators claiming that Zwerner raised alarms about the 6-year-old and sought assistance during the school year.

“she had asked for help,” one staffer wrote in that chat, referring to Zwerner.

“several times,” came another message.

“Yes she did.”

“two hours prior”

“all year.”

The messages, which were provided to The Post by the spouse of a Richneck Elementary schoolteacher, do not detail what specific assistance Zwerner sought, or to whom she directed her requests. Zwerner and her family have not returned repeated messages from The Washington Post.

A separate message written by a Richneck teacher, and obtained by The Washington Post from the local teachers union, alleges that school administrators waved away grave concerns about the 6-year-old’s conduct and that the school was overall unable to care for him properly.

The Post obtained the message on the condition the teacher’s identity not be revealed because the union feared she would face retaliation. The teacher declined interview requests through the union, the Newport News Education Association, citing worries of professional consequences and a directive from Newport News schools not to talk to the media about the shooting.

On one occasion, the boy wrote a note telling a teacher he hated her and wanted to light her on fire and watch her die, according to the teacher’s account. Alarmed, the teacher brought the note to the attention of Richneck administrators and was told to drop the matter, according to the account. The date of the incident was not mentioned.

The principal and vice principal of the school did not respond to requests for comment on the teacher's account.

A 6-year-old is accused of shooting someone at school. He isn't the first.

On a second occasion, the boy threw furniture and other items in class, prompting students to hide beneath their desks, according to the account. Another time, the teacher alleges in her account, the boy barricaded the doors to a classroom, preventing a teacher and students from leaving.

The teacher banged on the classroom door until another teacher from across the hall forced it open from the outside, according to the teacher's account. It was not clear whether the teacher asked for any specific action from administrators after that incident.

The teacher also described strained resources at the school. The lead special education teacher was frustrated because she has a high caseload, according to the account. Some aides regularly missed work, including for as long as a week at a time.

The teacher further alleged in her account that the boy was not receiving the educational services he needed, that it was difficult to get help with him during outbursts and that he was sometimes seen wandering the school unsupervised.

The boy's family said in a statement Thursday, the first public remarks his relatives have given about the shooting, that the 6-year-old was "under a care plan" that "included his mother or father attending school with him and accompanying him to class every day." That stopped the week of the shooting, the statement said.

"We will regret our absence on this day for the rest of our lives," the statement read.

The teacher's account dovetails with descriptions of the student's behavior shared by the spouse of a Richneck teacher and a mother whose child is enrolled in a class located across the hallway from Zwerner's. Both the spouse and the mother, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to protect their families' privacy, said the student was known campuswide for disruptive and violent behavior, and that school employees struggled to manage him in class.

The Post reached out to dozens of other Richneck teaching staff, administrators and parents to try to corroborate the teachers' allegations, but most have not responded or declined interviews, citing the ongoing police investigation or fear of reprisals.

Drew, the police chief, has said detectives will look into allegations of the student's troubling conduct before the incident, though he has not confirmed any specific incidents.

James Graves, president of the Newport News Education Association, said the union is investigating safety concerns raised by teachers in the wake of the shooting.

"We want to know what happened so we can protect our members," Graves said. "They believe and they know the administration should take their concerns more seriously than they did. This could have been prevented."

Thomas Britton, whose son was taught by Zwerner, said school officials never formally notified parents in the class about issues with the boy who fired the shot.

He said administrators mishandled the shooting, asserting they should have pulled the boy out of class until they had definitively determined whether he possessed a gun, and conducted a more thorough search.

“That was a shocking revelation that not only did he bring the weapon, but somebody gave a tip he had the weapon,” Britton said. “It seems to me it would be completely avoidable at that point.”

Valerie McCandless, a 52-year-old resident of Newport News who sent six kids to Richneck, said her children had a wonderful experience at the school, but she is troubled that the school’s administrators, some of whom she said are relatively new, failed to take preemptive action.

“I don’t think the teachers there are getting support, they’re not getting compassion, they’re not getting answers, they’re not getting listened to,” she said, adding of the shooting, “this was, I believe, God’s way of saying somebody needs to listen to them.”

Similar concerns emerged this week at a packed Newport News school board meeting, during which dozens of parents recounted their disappointment, anger and frustration with security measures at Richneck and other schools in the district. There have been three shootings on school grounds in Newport News since late 2021.

Several teachers said they received no support when they faced violence in the classroom or attacks from students. Some speakers claimed the district is more interested in keeping discipline statistics low than in taking meaningful action to address students’ problems.

A parent of a child in Zwerner’s class said her daughter had been bullied by classmates. She said she struggled to make the school take her concerns seriously and that the Richneck principal once failed to show for a conference about the bullying, although other officials did come.

She said Zwerner defended her daughter.

“Listen to your teachers when they have concerns,” the woman said raising her voice. “Please!”

Parker, the superintendent, said at a meeting with Richneck students that the district is purchasing 90 metal detectors to install at all Newport News schools and acquiring clear backpacks to hand out to students. He has assigned a new administrator to Richneck and also said officials were taking note of teachers’ concerns.

“We listened and we continue to work to improve current systems and processes to help better manage extreme behaviors that adversely affect the culture and climate in schools,” Parker wrote in a note to staff this week.

Celeste Holliday, a substitute teacher who covered Zwerner’s first-grade class at Richneck Elementary School on one occasion, said Zwerner had difficulty maintaining order in the class of 25 to 30 kids, but Holliday thought she was a conscientious teacher.

“She was great. She was doing the best she could,” Holliday said of Zwerner. “She mentally prepared me. She told me, ‘They’re rambunctious 6-year-olds. It’s going to be a hard day. Do the best you can.’”

Zwerner’s warning proved prescient.

Holliday said the class was rowdier than many others for which she has substituted. Holliday said that, on the day she worked at Richneck, one boy shoved another during recess and the boy scraped his knee. The injured boy had to go to the nurse’s office for treatment.

Afterward, the principal came to the classroom and told the boys to calm down because they were shouting, Holliday said. The principal filed a report about the shoving incident. Holliday said that, after the experience, she decided she would not substitute at Richneck Elementary School again.

Drew said in his online chat that detectives have wrapped up interviews with most students but are still seeking school disciplinary records and other materials related to the boy.

When the probe is complete, Drew said the findings will be sent to the Newport News commonwealth's attorney to decide whether anyone should be charged. Legal experts say it is unlikely the boy will be charged since children under 7 are presumed unable to form the intent to carry out an illegal act under Virginia law. But Drew has said it is possible someone could be charged for failing to secure the gun used in the shooting.

Ellenson, the attorney for the boy's family, said in an interview that the gun was secured with a trigger lock and kept on the top shelf of the mother's bedroom closet. Ellenson said it is unclear how the boy got hold of the gun.

Newport News police declined to comment on the family's characterization that the weapon was stored securely.

The Jan. 6 shooting occurred as school was winding down for the week. Police said the boy pulled out the gun as Zwerner was teaching and shot her.

Zwerner was rushed to the hospital with critical injuries; Drew said she is continuing to recover. Police said the boy brought the gun from home in a backpack.

The boy's family said in their statement he is in a hospital receiving treatment and expressed sorrow for the shooting.

"We continue to pray for his teacher's full recovery, and for her loved ones who are undoubtedly upset and concerned," the statement read. "At the same time, we love our son and are asking that you please include him and our family in your prayers."

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 UK hotel: child asylum seekers kidnapped |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/21/revealed-scores-of-child-asylum-seekers-kidnapped-from-home-office-hotel |
| GIST | <p>Dozens of asylum-seeking children have been kidnapped by gangs from a Brighton hotel run by the Home Office in a pattern apparently being repeated across the south coast, an Observer investigation can reveal.</p> <p>A whistleblower, who works for Home Office contractor Mitie, and child protection sources describe children being abducted off the street outside the hotel and bundled into cars.</p> <p>"Children are literally being picked up from outside the building, disappearing and not being found. They're being taken from the street by traffickers," said the source.</p> <p>It has also emerged that the Home Office was warned repeatedly by police that the vulnerable occupants of the hotel – asylum-seeking children who had recently arrived in the UK without parents or carers – would be targeted by criminal networks.</p> <p>About 600 unaccompanied children have passed through the Sussex hotel in the past 18 months, with 136 reported missing. More than half of these – 79 – remain unaccounted for.</p> <p>The shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, described the revelation as "truly appalling and scandalous" and called on the government to reveal how many children had disappeared and what was being done to find them.</p> <p>She added: "Suella Braverman [the home secretary] has failed to act on the repeated warnings she has been given about totally inadequate safeguards for children in their care.</p> |

“It is a total dereliction of duty for the Home Office to so badly fail to protect child safety or crack down on the dangerous gangs putting them in terrible risk. Ministers must urgently put new protection arrangements in place.”

The proportion of those taken by criminal elements is difficult to quantify, though sources say a number of those missing will be safe, having absconded to reunite with friends or even family.

The Mitie whistleblower also described witnessing children being in effect trafficked from a similar hotel run by the Home Office in Hythe, Kent, estimating that 10% of its youngsters disappeared each week.

The child protection source said some of the children missing from the Brighton hotel may have been trafficked as far away as Manchester and Scotland. One case is under investigation by the Metropolitan police in London.

Data revealed in October showed 222 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were missing from hotels run by the Home Office. Ministers admitted that they had no idea of their whereabouts.

Meanwhile, it has also emerged that no new guidance for police has been issued for tracking down missing asylum-seeking children, with sources saying it remains in “development”.

New data released under the Freedom of Information Act shows that newly arrived unaccompanied children spend an average of 16.5 days in Home Office hotels before being transferred into council care around the country.

When asked to comment, Brighton and Hove city council, which traditionally cares for child asylum seekers when they arrive in the UK without parents or guardians, referred queries on criminals targeting children to the police. Sussex police said queries on criminals targeting the children should be addressed to the Home Office.

The Home Office said: “Local authorities have a statutory duty to protect all children, regardless of where they go missing from. In the concerning occasion when a child goes missing, they work closely with other local agencies, including the police, to urgently establish their whereabouts and ensure they are safe.

“We have robust safeguarding procedures in place to ensure all children in our care are as safe and supported as possible as we seek urgent placements with a local authority.”

Brighton and Hove city council added: “We have been actively involved when any child is reported missing and have worked with the police and other agencies to try to trace them.”

Catherine Hankinson, National Police Chiefs’ Council lead for missing persons, said regular multi-agency meetings by police reviewed the response to every missing migrant child who had not been located.

[Return to Top](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/20 ‘Cult’ leader receives 60yrs in prison |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/20/us-cult-leader-larry-ray-sarah-lawrence-college |
| GIST | <p>A financial fraudster who lured students at an elite New York liberal arts college into a cult-like world of sexual, physical and emotional abuse was sentenced on Friday to 60 years in federal prison.</p> <p>Larry Ray, born Lawrence Grecco, was found guilty in April of sex trafficking and racketeering, among other related charges, stemming from the psychological manipulation – and ensuing physical violence – against his daughter’s roommates at Sarah Lawrence College.</p> <p>“It was sadism, pure and simple,” Judge Lewis Liman said in handing down the sentence, shortly after saying that Ray, 63, used his “evil genius” to torment his victims.</p> <p>Authorities became aware of his criminal behavior following an explosive New York magazine feature.</p> |

During Ray's four-week Manhattan federal court trial – during which he had several medical episodes – prosecutors laid out a chilling chronology of events that started when Ray moved into his daughter's dorm room around late 2010. Ray engaged in "therapy" sessions with some of her roommates under the false pretense of helping them navigate psychological issues.

Ray cast himself as a "father figure", and several of the roommates moved into an apartment in Manhattan's Upper East Side neighborhood the following summer. The one-bedroom flat devolved into a house of horrors, they said in their indictment against him.

Ray engaged in still more spurious "therapy" sessions with students, convincing them to reveal deeply "intimate" details about their lives. He subsequently "alienated" several of his victims from their parents and convinced some that they were "broken" and "in need of fixing" – by him, charging papers said

After securing these students' trust, Ray commenced "interrogation sessions" that mostly involved physical and verbal abuse. He made false allegations against the students during these sessions, including claims of property damage and, in one preposterous instance, accusations that one victim tried to poison him.

Ray once put a knife against one male victim's throat until he confessed to wrongdoing, and placed a chokehold around another male victim's neck, making him lose consciousness.

He slammed one female victim against the ground after she returned home with food that became cold. Ray also forced three female victims to work on a family property in North Carolina, where he kept food under lock and key – forcing them to work "in the middle of the night" and sleep outside despite the summer heat, prosecutors said in court papers.

Four years after Ray entered these students' lives, he told one female victim that she should engage in prostitution to repay him for purported property damage. The victim, Claudia Drury, did so from about 2014 to 2018.

"I became a prostitute," Drury testified and, according to the New York Times, said. "It was Larry's suggestion." Ray, who had sexually groomed Drury for several years prior, then pocketed more than \$500,000 she had made from prostitution.

Drury also told jurors that Ray became livid after she told one of her clients about parts of her life. He threatened to waterboard her.

Drury provided a victim-impact statement to the court that was read by her friend.

"It was unrelenting sadism," Drury's statement said.

"It was hell – it was a deliberate, educated, and sustained campaign to break me," Drury added. "Every time I was forced to prostitute myself ... I felt myself getting more numb."

"I barely have the energy to exist day to day," Drury also said of the ongoing emotional impact.

Santos Rosario, who was also victimized by Ray, gave a victim-impact statement in court. "He drove me to attempt suicide more than once and at one point, I was contemplating it daily," Rosario said.

As Ray's victims provided statements, he looked at them attentively, though showed no sign of emotion. When Ray entered his sentencing hearing, he walked with a limp, and wore headphones throughout the proceeding.

In pushing for a life sentence, prosecutors said that "over a period of years, he intentionally inflicted brutal and life-long harm on innocent victims that he groomed and abused into submission".

“While the defendant’s victims descended into self-hatred, self-harm, and suicidal attempts under his coercive control, the evidence showed that the defendant took sadistic pleasure in their pain, and enjoyed the fruits of their suffering,” they argued in court papers.

Prosecutors vehemently argued that lust for money was not Ray’s only motivation. “He also enjoyed being cruel,” they argued.

“It is obvious, for example, that his victims, without any experience with physical labor or construction equipment, had no real chance of making productive financial improvements to the property in North Carolina – and yet the defendant forced them to toil senselessly under punishing conditions for weeks on end simply to revel in their Sisyphean struggle,” they said.

“When his victims expressed anguish or guilt, he feigned sympathy and twisted the knife in deeper.

“He baited his victims to attempt suicide and then stymied their recoveries, while pretending to be the only one concerned with their wellbeing.” Their arguments in court echoed their sentencing paperwork.

Ray’s defense, on the other hand, contended in court papers that any sentence exceeding 15 years would be “unnecessary”. They also claimed that Ray himself grew up in an abusive home.

Ray’s grandmother hit him with a cat o’ nine tails, a “whip intended for severe physical punishment”. And, as Ray was forced to sleep on top of a pile of blankets in his grandmother’s basement, his grandfather sexually assaulted him, they said.

When Ray’s lawyers had their chance to argue in favor of a less-than-life sentence, they extensively discussed his purported suffering. Ray didn’t have anyone at court to support him which, they said, “speaks volumes” – namely, that he is alone in the world following the recent deaths of his father, stepfather and stepmother.

Ray also had the chance to address Liman and when he did so, largely cast himself as a victim, even appearing to choke up. “These three years I’ve spent in jail have been hell,” Ray said.

Ray rattled off a list of alleged health maladies – numbing and tingling in his extremities, ear-ringing, “very frightening” lesions – and the many medical specialists who have not been able to determine what is wrong. “Being in jail has been horrible,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

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|----------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 DOJ criminal probe into formula shortage |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/21/doj-opens-criminal-investigation-abbott-over-formu/ |
| GIST | <p>The Department of Justice has opened a criminal investigation into Abbott Laboratories’ conduct at its Michigan-based plant that became the center of last year’s widespread formula shortage.</p> <p>Attorneys with the DOJ’s consumer protection branch have been tapped to lead the probe, people familiar with the matter told the Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>“The DOJ has informed us of its investigation, and we’re cooperating fully,” an Abbott spokesman told the Journal.</p> <p>Abbott temporarily shut down production at the plant in Sturgis, Michigan and recalled formula produced at the facility last February after Food and Drug Administration inspectors found bacteria at the plant.</p> <p>The FDA inspection was prompted by reports of babies becoming sick after consuming the bacteria, though federal officials have not conclusively linked the bacteria found at the plant to the infants’ illnesses.</p> |

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| | <p>Abbott said that the bacteria found in the sick infants did not match the strains found at the plant.</p> <p>The plant's closure caused a nationwide shortage of formula, prompting the Biden administration to fly in foreign formula using Department of Defense-contracted aircraft to keep store shelves stocked.</p> <p>Abbott was later permitted to reopen the plant after signing a consent decree detailing agreed-upon safety measures needed to restart production.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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|----------|--|
| HEADLINE | 01/22 L.A. sheriff: 'mass shooting' Monterey Park |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/us/shooting-monterey-park-california.html https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/22/monterey-park-shooting-los-angeles-lunar-new-year-festival |
| GIST | <p>Multiple people were killed in a shooting late Saturday in Monterey Park, Calif., just east of Los Angeles.</p> <p>Many details about the attack remain unclear. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department described it as a "mass shooting," without specifying the number of victims. Video from the scene showed multiple ambulances swarming the area.</p> <p>The shooting occurred in an area that earlier in the day had hosted a festival celebrating the eve of the Lunar New Year, a major holiday in many Asian communities. Previous festivals have drawn tens of thousands of people.</p> <p>The Monterey Park government website said the event, on Garvey Avenue, "features vendors offering unique gifts and specialty items, food booths with various types of delectable items, amusement rides, and lots of live entertainment."</p> <p>Monterey Park, with a population of around 60,000 people, is around 65 percent Asian American and 27 percent Hispanic or Latino, according to government data. The city was the first in the continental United States to have a majority of residents with Asian ancestry, as communities of immigrants from Taiwan, mainland China, Japan and Vietnam settled there.</p> <p>According to local businesses, the area is typically quiet, with very little violence or commotion. There have been no previous cases of "murder and non-negligent manslaughter," according to F.B.I. records.</p> <hr/> <p>Nine people were killed in a mass shooting late on Saturday in a city east of Los Angeles following a lunar new year celebration that attracted thousands, police said.</p> <p>Sgt Bob Boese of the Los Angeles county sheriff's department said the shooting was reported at 10.22pm and occurred at a business on Garvey Avenue in Monterey Park. The shooter was male, Boese said early on Sunday.</p> <p>Officials provided no information for several hours after dozens of police officers had responded to reports of the shooting.</p> <p>Monterey Park is a city of about 60,000 people with a large Asian population that's about 10 miles (16km) from downtown Los Angeles.</p> <p>Seung Won Choi, who owns the Clam House seafood barbecue restaurant across the street from where the shooting happened, told the Los Angeles Times three people rushed into his restaurant and told him to lock the door.</p> |

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| | <p>The people told Choi there was a shooter with a machine gun who had multiple rounds of ammunition on him so he could reload. Choi said he believed the shooting took place at a dance club.</p> <p>The newspaper reported that the shooting happened after 10pm.</p> <p>Saturday was the start of the two-day festival, which is one of the largest lunar new year events in southern California.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| HEADLINE | 01/21 King Co. 35 fentanyl-related deaths in Jan. |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/35-fentanyl-related-overdose-deaths-king-county-one-month/281-3cfb149e-c94b-4ca3-89af-c1d1b92406e5 |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — Since the start of 2023, the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office says 35 people have died from fentanyl-related overdoses.</p> <p>Prosecutors say they are working to hold drug dealers accountable. In the last five months of 2022, 67 fentanyl dealing charges were filed.</p> <p>When narcotics cases used to come across Joseph Marchesano's desk, he says it would be a fairly even mix involving methamphetamine, heroin and cocaine.</p> <p>"But now, if there's a drug delivery case or an overdose case, it's a good guess that it's fentanyl," said Marchesano, a King County Senior Deputy Prosecutor. "Each week that we get those numbers from the medical examiner's office, it just seems like it's getting higher and higher."</p> <p>In King County, data shows fentanyl-related overdoses almost doubling from one year to the next. In 2020, 173 people died, and the following year, the number of deaths increased to 385. In 2022, there were 685 fentanyl-related overdoses in King County.</p> <p>The increase in overdoses has also led to an increase in case referrals. According to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's office, late last year, a large drug trafficking organization was busted with 68,000 fentanyl pills and more than four pounds of fentanyl powder. In September, Seattle police recovered a long list of items from a Ballard home, including 14 firearms, \$44,000 and more than 1,300 grams of fentanyl. Then in December, another case took more than 4,000 grams of fentanyl off the street. Marchesano says that's critical when you consider the consequences.</p> <p>"The victim has no idea of knowing which pill could be a fatal pill," he said.</p> <p>When there is an overdose death, a specific crime that prosecutors can charge is called controlled substances homicide.</p> <p>"Essentially what we need to do is prove that a drug dealer gave drugs to a victim and that victim ended up passing away because of those drugs," said Marchesano.</p> <p>Marchesano says recently, they have only had one case charged as controlled substances homicide. There have been cases where the charge has been reduced to drug delivery.</p> |
| Return to Top | |

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[Return to Top](#)